

Your Mess is Mine

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/13106976) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/13106976>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Marvel Cinematic Universe , Thor (Movies)
Relationship:	Loki/Tony Stark
Character:	Tony Stark , Loki (Marvel) , Thor (Marvel) , Bruce Banner , Stephen Strange , Peter Parker , Valkyrie , Happy Hogan , Mordo , Korg , Heimdall (Marvel) , James "Rhodey" Rhodes , Frigga (Marvel)
Additional Tags:	Post-Thor: Ragnarok (2017) , Alternate Universe , Asgardians Make It To Earth , Tony Stark is not back with Pepper , Tony Stark Needs a Hug , Loki (Marvel) Needs a Hug , Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD , Anxiety , Bonding over mutual fear over Thanos , mutual understanding , graphic depictions of support and trust , Fluff and Humor , Loki holding a grudge against Strange , Interest at first sight , Smartass family in the making , Mention of torture , mama's boys , mention of family deaths , Masturbation , Frottage , Protective Tony Stark , Jotunn Loki (Marvel) , Oral Sex , Temperature Play , Jotun Loki Sex , Bottom Loki (Marvel) , Anal Sex , Odin (Marvel)'s Bad Parenting , Temporary Magicless Loki , Past Pepper Potts/Tony Stark , body issues , Scars , Angst , Fluff , Humor , Falling In Love , Developing Relationship , declarations , mention of golden apples
Stats:	Published: 2017-12-23 Completed: 2018-01-09 Chapters: 22/22 Words: 41260

Your Mess is Mine

by [kipli](#)

Summary

With their arrival to Norway and the building of New Asgard, Loki is drawn to figuring out why Tony Stark now appears to be carrying the weight of the universe on his exhausted shoulders.

Notes

I want to start with thanking [vanillabuzz](#) for being the best cheerleader and my #1 fangirl and partner, without who I'd never finish these. Also thank you to [izhunny](#) and [akuma_river](#) for their wonderful beta work and dealing with my dislike for commas this fic. ;)

Also thank you to [kingloptr](#) for the cover artwork! They were incredible and I highly recommend commissioning from them!

Title taken from Vance Joy's Mess is Mine. I will be posting 2-3 chapters every other day

until the fic is finished. If you've read me before, you'll know what you're getting into, but to anyone new, I am a sucker for supportive relationships. :3 Enjoy your end to the year!

Chapter 1



The flames parted as the ship made it through the upper atmosphere. Blue sky and the hint of white clouds filled the view port. Loki frowned while he looked down at the ever closer green fields they were making for in their descent. “You’re certain they’ll just *hand* you land to claim as ours?”

“If we ask nicely enough,” Thor harassed lightly in return, joining Loki to look down onto what was apparently Norway. “Do you think Midgardians would turn away the homeless?”

“You haven’t spent much time on Earth lately have you.”

“More than you have.”

A half dozen fighter jets converged on their location as their altitude decreased into flight zones. They were painted black but not emblazoned with any markings Loki recognized so he dismissed them as the local government's. Still, he harassed, “Oh look, the welcoming committee is here.”

More fighter jets arrived and circled around their ship in a defensive stance. Thor frowned at them. “Well, they haven't fired yet.”

“Yet,” Loki mocked.

“Slow our descent.” Thor turned to Valkyrie and Banner. “Can we speak with them?”

Banner furrowed his brow down at the panel in front of him. “This tech is way over Earth abilities but there should be...”

Valkyrie reached around him and punched a button. An automated voice rang out mid-sentence, “- leave immediately. Unauthorized foreign ship, your arrival is not documented. Force will be taken if you do not leave immediately. Unauthorized foreign-”

“Do not open fire! This is Thor, Son of Odin, Earth's Mightiest Avenger-” Loki snorted but Thor ignored him. “This ship harbors my people. We are refugees who seek asylum. Bruce Banner is among us. Please allow us to land.”

There was a long moment of silence, and Loki began thinking over which of the other realms would put up less of a fuss, when a familiar voice rang out in reply.

“Bruce?!” Man of Iron's voice echoed in shocked surprise.

Banner lit up. “Right here, Tony. Let us land and see for yourself.”

“Are you not excited to see me, Stark?” Thor teased.

“Fuckin' thrilled, big guy.” There was another beat of silence and then the fighter jets retreated to a less threatening distance. “Meet you there in ten, I'm in Paris. Keep everyone inside for now. I'll need a detailed list of all seeking asylum to give to the suits. How many you got?”

“Hundreds.”

Stark's voice rumbled, “Well then this should be *fun*.”

Chapter 2

The field beside a high cliff facing the ocean was already host to dozens of Iron Man clones watching their landing. Stark was building a robot army? He must have them stashed all over the globe if they arrived quicker than himself. Loki frowned at the thought. What was he preparing for?

“Korg, can you work on collecting a ship's manifest of names?” Thor handed over an electronic tablet to the rocky creature.

“Oh sure, you bet!” Korg nearly bounced, for a rock creature, to immediately start delegating his team to collect the information.

Thor nodded and waved a hand for Loki to follow as he grabbed Valkyrie and Banner to make their way through the crowd to the middle of the ship and the main hangar doors. Loki silently mouthed wards around himself to keep that no rate human sorcerer from surprising him again. Since when did Midgard have proper magic users? Ones that actually protected the realm?

The four of them stepped down the gangway and onto the windswept grass. Banner cast a squinted glance around the emptiness and muttered, “Norway huh? Better start building before winter comes.”

Thor huffed, “You have not seen Asgardian ingenuity at work yet, Bruce.”

“Still going to be cold as hell.”

Loki tilted his head slightly at the view. “Perhaps I'll like this place more than I thought.”

“Why can't we build closer to the equator?” Valkyrie wondered, frowning at the expanse of craggy cliffs and not much else. “Somewhere more temperate... with a real beach and a beer...”

“This is where Odin rests,” Thor answered. “And so here is where Asgard will be.”

“Plus,” Loki added, “they can't very well argue they're using this space and we cannot have it.”

“*You* cannot have it,” a voice rang out before a familiar portal opened and the infernal human mage appeared through it. Strange looked to Thor as a twirling portal opened at Loki's feet. “I thought you were taking him off Earth. Permanently.”

Loki scoffed as he stood unmoved above the open portal beneath his feet. “You honestly believe your parlor tricks will work a second time?” He unsheathed his knives and moved to advance. “I will happily teach you a few real spells before I rend you-”

Thor put a hand to Loki's chest to stop his advance. “Brother, not now. You cannot quarrel while we seek asylum.”

“It won't take me long. I'll be done with him before Stark ever arrives.”

Banner frowned in confusion. “Who is this guy?”

“A pathetic human mage with-”

“Yes yes, do be quiet.” Strange stretched a long length of glittering power between his fingers and then flicked it at Loki, knocking Thor's hand aside as a glowing box snapped into place around

Loki, locking him in place.

Loki shouted an expletive but no one beyond the transparent box heard him.

Strange looked positively pleased with himself as he sighed, "Finally. Now where was I? Oh yes." He turned to Thor. "You are to remove him from Earth immediately or I'll be forced to deal with him myself."

This arrogant buffoon dares to threaten him? Oh for Odin's sake... Loki's daggers glowed green as he imbued them with his own power and stabbed at the glowing box at head height, slicing through the magic and opening the box as he dragged the daggers down.

"I promise he will do no harm," Thor attempted to reassure.

"Do not make promises you cannot keep, brother," Loki snarled as he stepped out of the confinement. "I will teach him some manners." He imbued his throwing daggers with green power before tossing an array at Strange and leaping at the petulant Midgardian.

Strange blocked the throwing knives with a magic shield and then teleported a meter to the right, leaving Loki to land on the grass and nothing more.

Yet more silly tricks. Loki swerved and with a twist of his hand locked Strange into place. The look of surprise on Strange's features as he couldn't teleport away from Loki's second advance was priceless. He would teach this little human what an actual sorcerer looked like. Strange brought up his glowing shield again but Loki's still green daggers easily sliced through the magic. The shield disappeared. True hints of panic on Strange's features were delicious.

"Loki, enough!" Thor bellowed, grabbing Loki by the cloak and yanking him back before he could inflict any real damage on the man. "You have proven your point."

"I don't know if I truly have, perhaps if you'd allow me to—" He left a clone beside Thor and appeared himself behind Strange, the man only barely countering the attack with another shield. It was ripped to nothingness once again but before Loki could truly strike a blast from above knocked him backwards a length onto his backside.

"Making friends already, reindeer games," Stark's voice called from his suit as he came to land between the two magicians. His helm retracted to reveal Stark's head while he quipped, "Here I thought you were dead." He offered a helping hand to upright Loki.

Loki stared a moment. Had so much time gone past? It was only a mere five years, give or take, since the last time he'd seen Stark, but the man looked worn. Humans aged so quickly... Not that Stark looked *old* but he looked drained. His bravado was there, but something disastrously heavy weighed on him. Loki pulled his thoughts back together and took Stark's offered metal glove, righting himself and then dusting off his own tunic to do something with his hands.

Stark raised an eyebrow at Loki, then turned to Strange. "Who the hell are you?"

"That's what I'm still wondering," Banner said.

Valkyrie smirked, "I like him."

"You would," Loki sniped.

"Mister Stark, I am not here for pleasantries. I'm Doctor Stephen Strange, Earth's protector of all things arcane, Sorcerer Supreme, and I cannot allow this threat to roam freely."

“Earth's protector of... Where were you when he was here ripping up New York?” Stark tossed a nod toward Loki.

“I've, um, only had the title for about a year.”

Loki huffed a thoroughly amused laugh.

“So you're human?” Banner asked. “How'd you manage to learn all... that.” He waved his hand vaguely at Strange.

“Ancient monks. Enlightenment. You know, the usual. If we can stay on topic-”

Stark pointed a finger at Strange, interrupting him, “Wait weren't you some big shot surgeon? Times did an article on you being 'The Next Anthony Edward Stark' or some bullshit. Didn't you nearly die?”

“Nearly.”

“Pity,” Loki muttered.

Thor shot him a look to be silent.

“So as I was *saying*,” Strange attempted to restart the conversation. “Loki is on my list of creatures banned from Earth, and I don't care what the situation is, he must leave immediately or be shackled.”

Loki scoffed, “I'd like to see you try.”

Thor stepped forward. “My people are seeking refuge and Loki is among them. I will see to his good behavior.”

Valkyrie spoke up, “And there are others with us who have similar talents, either used in combat or creation. Can you not sense them? Would you shackle them all?” She raised her chin defiantly at Strange.

The man cast his gaze past them to the large ship beyond. His brow furrowed, then he shook his head, “None have proven themselves dangerous, except for Loki.”

“Tarnished your reputation there, long legs, what with the whole world domination scheme,” Stark said to Loki, casting a genuine grin his way. Something within Loki ridiculously enjoyed the sight. Words failed him. He couldn't find a proper retort. Stark's grin grew at the sight and then he turned back to Strange. “How about this. You can obviously track him, you found him here soon as they landed. Why don't we say he can't leave Norway without an Avenger with him. Would that do it, oh great and powerful Oz?”

Loki made an annoyed face at the idea of needing chaperons everywhere but remained silent. Whatever got this aggravation to leave.

Strange took a moment to consider, still eyeing Loki with distrust, but finally relented, “Fine, but the moment he goes anywhere unsupervised, I'm banishing him.”

Loki snorted at the mere idea of his managing such a feat.

“Deal,” Stark nodded, then looked to Thor. “Deal?”

“Agreed.”

“Now if you don't mind,” Stark stated, his suit hissing as it opened for him to step out, “My long lost best bud is here, *and* wearing my threads, so.” He shot Strange a look as he stepped over to Banner, clearly annoyed at the mostly nonsense interruption.

Strange acquiesced and moved to step away, a portal opening up behind him, but he was still stuck in place by Loki's magic. Loki pretended not to notice his situation until Strange grumbled, “Ahem.”

“Oh, are you leaving? Fantastic.” Loki released his magical hold on him and Strange glared while disappearing through his portal.

“Where the hell have you been?!” Loki overheard Stark with Banner.

“Another planet, well technically *two* other planets, it's a long story.” The two embraced in a squeezing hug.

Korg smiled, if a rock creature could be said to smile, as he came down the ramp to them. “Oh good, happy greetings!” He came to Thor and handed over the tablet. “All two-hundred and forty two homeless accounted for.”

Stark pulled himself away from Banner and took the tablet from Thor, flicking through the list of names. “All Asgardians like yourself, patches?”

Thor smiled despite himself at the nickname. “More or less. Mostly families and craftsman. Hela destroyed the majority of our fighters in her forceful taking of the throne.”

“Hela?”

“Our sister.”

Stark raised an eyebrow at him. “Any other siblings I should know about?”

Thor shook his head. “No, and as far as I'm aware, she perished along with Asgard.”

“I wouldn't count her out, your family has a tendency to rise from the dead.” Stark tossed Loki a harassing look.

Loki managed a retort this time. “Somehow I doubt even she could pull off a return from an exploding realm. Me, perhaps, but not her.”

Stark gave an amused grunt, his gaze lingering on Loki a moment longer, and then returned to looking at the tablet. “I'll send the names along to the suits. You picked the right country to come calling on. Norway's already gloating to the other Nordic countries that you picked them to settle on. Let me know what you need to start building. This location's fucking remote but I can make it happen.”

“Thank you, Stark.”

“Don't mention it.”

Stark cast one more look at Loki, something in the depths of those dark eyes that Loki could not read, before he turned back to Banner to reconnect.

Thor came to stand beside Loki. “See. I told you everything would be fine. Earth isn't so bad, and not *everyone* hates you.”

“You’re truly pathetic at reassurances, brother.” Loki’s gaze followed Banner and Stark as they went up into the ship together, then turned to Thor. “And now you’re to be my handler wherever I go.”

“Haven’t I always been?”

“Hardly,” Loki grumbled and Thor pulled him in for an unreciprocated hug.

Chapter 3

Plans were immediately put into action. Stark was nothing if not efficient. Refugee tents were brought to the site within the hour and a tent city was formed by the next. Norway promised food and supplies by the end of the day but they couldn't manage Stark's expediency. Regardless, the ship was now emptied, everyone settling into the makeshift homes. Now the interior of the ship was taken over by Stark and Banner as they simultaneously dissected the alien tech and worked with Thor on plans for permanent structures. A makeshift table had been constructed and then immediately cluttered with tablets. A floating display read out Thor's building material demands that Stark had agreed to provide.

Loki only half listened as he watched from a corner, reclined against a wall, perched on a deactivated panel, legs folded in front of himself. He wasn't interested in claiming a paltry cot outside in the tents but city building was of no interest to him either. The conversation was dull but the view was pleasantly riveting.

There was something about the way Stark's fingers tapped, touched, traced over the tech. He had a clear fondness for it, even the alien and foreign tech he was working to understand. Loki idly watched Stark work while not staring too intently to be noticed. There was something different about Stark. What had changed him so in the handful of years since he last saw him? Humans were a frail lot but it wasn't age that drained Stark's energy. Something was wrong but what precisely?

The man was still pleasing to the eye. Stark had removed his suit jacket to reveal a tight fitting, pale blue button-down shirt beneath and trousers that were tailored to perfection. Cuffs were undone and sleeves rolled up forearms. He exuded command and confidence, a hint of happy pleasure at working beside Banner once more. Whatever weighed him down was tossed aside for the work at hand. There could be worse men in charge of his time on Earth.

Thor's attention shifted away from the planning, most everything set into place, as the two scientists huddled around tech, and he caught Loki's staring. His features hardened and he slipped away from the pair, marching over to Loki's perch.

"No," Thor said plainly but firmly.

Loki raised an eyebrow up at Thor as he feigned innocence. "No what, dear brother?"

"I will not have you *ingratiating* yourself to Stark and manipulating your way out of our deal with Strange."

Thor was finally learning a thing or two but for once that wasn't what had been on Loki's mind, oddly enough. Still he played along, "Do you think so little of me?"

"I know so. I only have to look to your antics with the Grandmaster."

"Without my *antics* I would not have been there to help you."

"By attempting to recapture me for him?" Thor grumbled, then shook his head. "You are looking for a way out but I will not allow you to manipulate Stark."

"Such a soft spot for the human?"

"He has been through much."

Loki couldn't keep the interest out of his voice, "Has he?"

Thor tilted his head slightly at the tone. "Yes. Now drop it. Find someone else to toy with."

"I have done nothing-"

"You were thinking it."

Loki rolled his eyes at his brother.

Thor crossed his arms over his chest. "Please, brother. The last thing he requires is your brand of attention."

"So protective. Have you replaced Jane so swiftly?"

Thor merely narrowed his eyes on Loki in response.

"Fine," Loki lied. "I shall distract myself elsewhere."

Thor grunted, took in Loki a moment longer, and then turned to rejoin the pair at the table.

The whole conversation only made Loki more curious as to what weighed so heavily on Stark that Thor would attempt to intervene. His oaf of a brother had even noticed the burden. And his brother's mentioning of the Grandmaster made the idea of gaining Stark's trust all the more appealing. He *did* require something to put his mind towards, even if it was already wandering in that direction on its own, and now he had the added incentive of doing so to irritate Thor.

Loki gracefully stood, doing so with enough flourish as to gain all three's attention, and stretched languidly. Something within him relished Stark's lingering gaze on him as the other two returned to their work. He took his time tugging down and smoothing out his leather tunic, basking in Stark's attention, before turning swiftly enough for the door as to flare his cape out behind himself.

Stark's voice echoed in the nearly empty ship. "Where you off to, long legs?"

Loki spun around but continued walking backwards toward the cargo door. "Out." He cocked a grin at Stark. "Don't miss me too terribly." He turned back around and strutted his way out and down the gangway.

More drone and ship drops were being handled by those put in charge of supplies. There was a bustle of Stark's robots coming and going along with a helicopter which had landed with supplies, presumably from Norway itself. Large crates were stacked up, most with food and survival gear, but there was the beginning of a stockpile of metal and wood for construction. People bustled here and there, children gathered together for a lesson of some sort, and a small crew of warriors trained in the distance. Tents aside, it was beginning to look like an Asgardian outpost. Thor was right, though he'd never tell him so. It was the people who made Asgard what it was, not the place. Still it was going to be a while before anything resembling a city was built.

Loki came around one end of the spaceship and then slowed to a stop. Beams of steel were sticking out of the ground some twenty meters away from the tents, Stark's robots welding and building a foundation out of metal. The outline of it was already many stories tall. Stark was even quicker than he'd imagined.

Speaking of quick...

"They do good work," Stark said as he came up beside Loki, joking, "Not bad for a few hours in

but I'll be screwed if they ever decide to unionize and demand backlogged coffee breaks."

Loki turned to the shorter man and cocked his head to one side. "Did you miss me already?"

"Tremendously," Stark teased. He lifted a tablet to compare his schematic to the work of his robots and the sound of Banner talking with Thor came from further back. Of course. He was not actually being left alone with Stark. "That and your brother wants to downsize the Avengers building to something minuscule. He doesn't want it to dwarf his precious Viking village."

"I say make it bigger, then. In protest."

Stark twisted a grin down at his tablet. "A man after my own heart." He tucked the tablet beneath his arm and looked up, meeting Loki's gaze. "So then, the whole not dead thing, how'd that happen?"

"Ah yes," Loki said and cleared his throat, clasping hands behind his back. He stepped forward toward the construction and Stark followed, gaining them some distance from Thor and Banner. "Well, I wasn't convinced that I would remain out of prison after helping with the Dark Elves. It was all a bit of a show so he would leave me behind, but as you can see, I've not gone conquering Earth again in my ill-gotten freedom."

Stark seemed to accept his words but he still pushed, "What did you do, then? You supposedly died like two years ago. I don't see you sitting on a beach somewhere drinking mai tais."

"Not precisely," he admitted. As much as he'd like to paint a glowing picture for Stark, he did his best to be truthful but gloss over the answer at the same time. "Our father wanted to retire but Thor continued to balk at taking the throne so I... *helped* our father and watched things in his stead."

"Is that so?" Stark said, sounding unconvinced. "Mighty forgiving of him, after he put you away."

"We came to an understanding."

Stark shook his head, looking away as he cocked a wry grin and sighed, "You're a shit liar."

Loki blinked at the sudden attack. "I beg your pardon?"

"At least make an effort to convince me Thor was lying about you wiping Odin's mind and shuffle him off to an old folks home."

Loki frowned. "Thor already told you."

"Of fucking course he did." He tossed a glare at Loki. "For the God of Mischief, I would've expected a long yarn about finding yourself somewhere or some other bullshit. Not these boring half truths."

Loki squared his shoulders. "Firstly, I am an exceedingly excellent liar." Stark huffed a laugh but Loki continued, "Secondly, you're berating me for attempting to be *truthful* with you?"

"Half truthful anyway."

"I was trying to build trust."

"Sure you were, princess."

"Fine, yes, I wiped Odin's mind, sent him somewhere to be looked after, and pretended to be him in his stead. I looked after Asgard and Thor got his wish to waltz around wherever else he'd like other

than sitting on the throne.”

“And it just *happened* to be you got your own throne in the bargain.”

Loki heaved a sigh. “Yes, well, it was quite dull, so I’m not interested in retaking it.”

“Uh huh,” Stark said, unconvinced. “And other than our resident Taco Supreme larping mage, why are you still here and not running off to cause chaos somewhere else?”

Ah, so this was what Stark was getting at with his questioning. Loki stopped and looked back to Thor, then further to the people beyond. He wondered a moment what to say. What would Stark *like* him to say? Something heroic? Selfless? Make a joke about missing Earth or Stark himself?

He mulled it over before admitting with a sigh, “I don’t know.” He looked to Stark’s deep brown eyes. “Thor at least thinks he needs my help but most here see me as a nuisance. Yet where would I run off to? I haven’t decided. Thanos will find me wherever I go...” The last words tumbled out of his lips without being able to stop them. Something about Stark’s intense gaze pulled them from him.

The weight on Stark’s shoulders returned as he muttered, “Thanos?”

Loki nodded. “The Chitauri. Thanos. He will finish what he forced me to begin. He will come for us. For all of us.”

Liquid pools of sheer panic and dread filled Stark’s eyes as they went wide. “When? When is he getting here?”

Old terrors ripped at the back of Loki’s mind as he said, “I do not know. Too soon for any hope of victory.”

Stark turned ashen in front of him.

So this was what weighed on Stark’s shoulders.

He could not blame the man for his fear was justified. Yet, why did he alone seem aware of this looming threat? Where were the other so called Avengers to defend against it? Why did all worry seem to be heaped upon only Stark?

Banner came up to them with Thor. “What are you two love birds whispering about?” Then Banner caught sight of Stark attempting to pull himself back together and he snapped a firm look at Loki. “What did you do?”

“N-nothing!” Loki stammered. “We were discussing the Chitauri and-”

“I... I need to sit... down...” Stark interrupted, rushing away from them, his breathing gone rapid and ragged.

“Loki,” Thor rumbled.

“I swear it! We spoke of Thanos and then...”

Banner stood torn a moment, glaring at Loki, who struggled not to back away, before Banner grunted as he rushed off after Stark.

“I suppose I should no longer be worried,” Thor snarled. “You’re doing a fantastic job entrancing him.”

Loki's face fell.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Thank you for every last comment. Merry Xmas!

Thor's snoring reverberated through the tent. The oaf was sprawled out on his stomach over two cots pressed together. Loki heaved a sigh as he stared up at the ceiling of their tent. He'd been banished from getting anywhere near Stark for the remainder of the day and Thor had kept an even tighter watch on him, insisting they even share a tent when night arrived. At the very least, Thor hadn't insisted on talking, and instead nearly instantly fell asleep in a heap.

Loki's own mind was far too awake to rest. He'd been in a daze ever since Stark had rushed from him. How had the mere mention of the Chitauri brought Stark to such a state? He'd battled and defeated them, more or less, back in New York, and no one else seemed affected by their mention. If anyone should fall to pieces at the thought of Thanos, it ought to be himself.

A frown creased Loki's brow. Thanos. He was merely marking time until the creature arrived to their realms with his army. Reckoning would arrive no matter what they did here. Fear seeped into Loki's veins. He would *never* be ready to endure Thanos' rage again. The torture. The twisting of reality. The grooming for his desires. Long pushed aside memories floated to the surface to torment him. The tent disappeared to form a cold cage. Lashings. Screaming. Endless hours teetering on the edge of consciousness as pain overwhelmed. Withheld meals. Withheld sleep. Withheld comfort. Promises of everything if only he relented to Thanos' will. Loki in return promising anything for it all to cease.

Loki sucked in a breath as he came back to himself. His eyes refocused on the tent above. He struggled to calm his own heart. He was safe. Safe enough, for now. Thor's snoring was somehow a comfort to hear again. He released a long breath and scrubbed hands over his face, shoving all memories back into a locked box to be ignored.

His feet itched to pace. He got up as quietly as he was able, pausing to be certain Thor still slept, before he crept out of the tent into the cold night. It was a wash of relief. He breathed deeply of the fresh air and cast a look up at the sky. Faint clouds covered the curtain of stars and a crescent moon. It was a different sight than Asgard's skies, but it was still reassuring.

He walked without thinking but his feet knew where to take him.

Most everyone was fast asleep. The bustling tent city was quiet. A few warriors were on watch and Stark's robots continued to fly here and there. He could hear them working on the Avengers' building. They were making marked progress even in the pitch dark.

Loki carefully climbed the gangway onto the ship. There was a faint glow of light emanating from within. He listened for voices but the only sound was metal against metal and the creak of something giving way. A lamp sat upon the makeshift table, gently illuminating the far end of the hold. A quick glance around found no sign of Banner, thank goodness. However Stark was on his knees, a panel of the ship ripped open, and his upper half was lost within the electronics beyond. He seemed to find whatever he was looking for, the sound of metal sliding free with a click, and then he leaned back out with a faintly glowing piece of tech about the size of his fist in his hand.

The display above the opened panel dimmed and turned off. Had he found a backup power supply?

Loki stopped beside a wall a number of meters away, still at the edge of what the small lamp illuminated. He watched Stark grunt as he stood, mumbling to himself and prodding at the piece of tech he'd wrestled free. He'd removed his dress shirt at some point and wore a dirtied black undershirt, his dark slacks now a mess. He roughly pried a piece of metal slotted into the greater chunk and held the flat square piece up to the light. It glimmered as Stark squinted at it, turning it over, then swore and tossed everything onto the table. Loki blinked as he finally noticed many other of the same type of components piling up on the table. Whatever Stark was up to, it was not going well, and he kicked the table, sending some of the tech pieces scattering onto the floor.

“Fuck fuck, fuck it, fucking-” Stark snarled to himself, rubbing at his face with dirty hands. Then suddenly shouted “Shit!” in frustration. Loki flinched slightly at the harsh sound of it. Stark grimaced at himself and lowered unsteady hands back down, turning to stalk along the walls panels. He tapped at one, then liked the look of another, going to his knees and roughly yanking it open, metal screeching against metal.

Perhaps Loki should leave. Something enormous troubled Stark and he had a feeling it was his own doing. It was likely best to leave the tinkerer alone to demolish the ship if he wished. Yet something within Loki balked at the idea of merely leaving.

Stark strained to get the same power core out this time. It seemed to be locked in place. He growled as he tugged and yanked. The more he strained, the more he seemed to tremble on his knees. His thighs and shoulders shook with each ever more frantic tug. Panic and frustration overwhelmed.

“Oh come on you fucking son of a bitch,” Stark snarled and gave one final pull. His grip slipped and he rocked backwards, knocking his head against the top of the open panel. “Fuck!!” he shouted in utter vexation, punching the top of the panel and then the component itself. The sound of flesh against metal stung even from Loki's place watching. Stark's trembling turned to true shaking as it all became too much. He slumped to the side, then turned and sat with his back against the next closed panel, breathing hard as he struggled to calm himself.

How had this become the Man of Iron? And where was Banner? Where was anyone else to witness him? It boggled Loki's mind to see him as he was. His thoughts kept repeating that it had only been a handful of years. It was too short a time. It hadn't been enough time for such a change.

Yet, where was Stark's support?

Stark slid fingers back into his hair and kept his bent arms up above his head. It took a long minute for his breathing to even out and his panic to dissipate. Eventually he slumped more drained but calmer against the panel. Finally he dropped his hands into his lap and thumped the back of his head against the interior of the ship. He forced himself back onto knees to return to attempting to retrieve the tech from within the panel, and he startled Loki from his thoughts with a grunted shout over his shoulder, “You gonna stare all night, princess?”

Loki's cheeks flushed in surprise at being caught, but at least the low light hid the blush from view. How long ago had he been spotted? He stepped forward, toward Stark, as the man grunted and tugged on the uncooperative component. Stark swore again and gave one last heaving yank before losing his grip and falling backwards onto his ass.

“Shit!” Stark kicked at the opened panel door and it slammed backwards into the panel beside it with a resounding clamor of metal. “Be of some fuckin' use, long legs. Get that the fuck out of there, would you?” He pointed at the glowing tech within.

Loki strolled his way up beside Stark and stared at the component a moment before turning to look down at Stark massaging the palm of his unsteady left hand. “Why?”

“Because,” Stark growled, avoiding the question.

“Because why?”

“Because *please!*”

There was the beginnings of another tremble through Stark at the delay. Loki raised an eyebrow but acquiesced. He stepped over Stark's legs, who then pulled them out of the way, and crouched to pry the piece free. It was soundly stuck but Loki's greater strength easily loosened it with a firm tug. It clicked free and he heard a relieved sigh from Stark.

Stark dragged himself onto his feet and met Loki as he stood with the tech in hand. Loki hesitated a moment, contemplating demanding answers before handing over the object, but Stark's gaze held barely controlled mania, panic, and pain. Loki did not wish to see him reduced to another attack. He handed over the tech and Stark immediately turned away to the table, wrestling to free the iridescent piece within.

“What are you doing, Stark?”

“Nothing.” Stark pulled the square tab out and held it up to the light. He growled as it apparently did not meet his expectations, tossing his hard won tech onto the heap with the rest.

“It seems to be a *lot* of nothing.”

“Yeah, well, that's me in a nutshell.” He grunted and turned to drag open another panel, metal scraping against metal. “Hard work that amounts to fuck all in the end.”

“Stark, this is a cargo ship. I doubt whatever you're looking for will be held within it. It's at least a century old.”

“But it's still centuries beyond Earth's tech.” Stark's upper half disappeared into the newly opened panel once more. Loki's gaze slid down along Stark's backside and the way his untucked tank rode up to reveal skin beneath but then Stark was soon out with a click, this piece giving way easily. “And I need some fucking help.”

Loki hastily looked elsewhere as Stark stood and stalked his way back to the light to pry open the piece. “But these are backup power cores. You have your blue glowing-” Loki paused mid-sentence and came around the table to stare at Stark. “Where is your chest piece?”

Stark thumped fingers against his metal free chest between working on the tech. “Got it removed.”

“Why?”

Stark blinked up at Loki. “Why not?” He pulled the square piece free and held it up to the light to examine.

“*Why not?*” Loki repeated back at him in astonishment. “It was the only thing which protected you from that staff. If I had controlled you, New York would've actually been hit with a nuclear bomb and the Chitauri and Thanos would be here regardless. So, yes, I ask *why* toss aside such protection?”

“It was a constant reminder and I had to fucking get rid of it.” Stark grumbled and tossed the tech

aside again, once more not what he wanted. “Not that removing it has helped so thanks for pointing out yet another useless step in my life.”

“It was a reminder?”

Stark's gaze hardened on him. His voice was rough and jagged as he snarled, the words spilling out in a rush, “Yeah. A reminder. A reminder of its creation. A reminder of me not being whole. A reminder of betrayal. A reminder of all the times I've failed someone. A reminder of all I need to do. A reminder of that nuke. A reminder of that fucking space fleet. A reminder that it's coming and how I need to work harder. I need to stop it. I need to stop it but I can't. I fucking can't!” He picked up a deactivated core and chucked it across the bay, smashing it into pieces as it hit the far wall with a resounding crash. His left hand trembled and he reached to cradle it with his right.

Loki stood dumbfounded at the man before him. He looked exhausted but he pushed through everything because of his fear of Thanos? Rather than hide and wait on the inevitable, ignoring what was to come, as Loki did, he attempted to fight against that which he knew he could not win? What strength of will...

“Where is Banner?” Loki soothed.

Stark blinked at the question and straightened his posture, marching around to yank open yet another panel. He grumbled between teeth, “Asleep.”

“He left you here?”

“He thinks I'm sleeping.”

“You should work with him.”

“I do.” Stark grunted as he dropped to his aching knees and leaned into the panel's interior. “But Bruce needs his sleep.”

“And you do not?”

Stark snorted. “I'm a genius. We only sleep a few hours a day, maybe.” He grunted as he tugged on the aged conduit before yanking it free.

“This is not idle tinkering.”

“What are you, my fuckin' therapist?”

“You require rest, Stark.”

Stark shook his head as he stood with the device and returned to the table. “I'm fine.”

“Hardly.”

Stark shot him a look, then returned to prying loose the piece within once more.

Loki sighed and changed tactics. “Why dissect these? You have your own power cores, the one removed from your chest or not.”

“These are cheap, mostly disposable, run forever, as you said yourself this ship is over a century old. Mine are hard to build commercially, especially the small ones. I have a rough enough time getting them made for my guys outside and I need more. Lots more.” He yanked the piece free and held it up. It glittered markedly more than the others had when in the light. Stark gave a happy hum

and surprisingly marched away for the gangway out.

Loki rushed to follow after. "So you wish to understand these?"

"It's a leg up, right?" Stark walked out into the darkness and made for his suit still resting where he'd landed upon arriving. He took the alien tech and slotted it into place at the neck of the suit. The contraption whirled to life, light casting them in shadows beneath the stars. "How long until you've got this analyzed, Friday?"

A female voice rang out from the suit, "Four hours, thirty-five minutes, boss."

Stark huffed happily and thumped the suit on the chest. "Perfect." He turned to march back onto the ship. "That gives me time to-"

Loki snatched his wrist before he could rush off once more. He shook his head as he pulled the man toward the tents instead. "Time to rest, you mean."

"I'm not tired," Stark snarled like a petulant child. He jerked against Loki's hold on him but regardless he was dragged closer to the tents. Loki could feel his racing heartbeat through the hold on him.

"Four hours. Your eyes closed. Calm. That's the least of what you require."

"Stop trying to analyze me, you asshole." Stark twisted his wrist in Loki's grip and Loki released him as to not harm him. "Go play mother hen with someone else. I'm fine." He rubbed at his wrist while he turned around, marching back onto the ship.

Loki paused a moment, tempted to throw his hands in the air and forget the idiot, but something once more pushed him to follow after.

Stark's glare at him was markedly darker and angrier than earlier. "Get the fuck out of here. Leave me alone."

"It's my ship."

"It's Thor's."

"Close enough." Loki reached out with his powers and found just what he was hoping for. He held his hands up and a bottle of red wine and a prepackaged sandwich shimmered into being, teleported from the ever thoughtful Norwegian stash of supplies. "When did you last eat?" He tilted the bottle temptingly at Stark.

Stark's eyes immediately took to the wine. He grunted and crossed the distance to Loki, snatching the bottle and the food. "Fine. You can stay."

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stark stalked to the far end of the bay and sat down on the floor, his back to the wall, sandwich unopened on his lap, and unwrapped the foil from around the top of the wine.

At least he'd managed to get him to sit still. Loki strode his way to him as Stark fussed with the bottle to get it open. As Loki came up to him, Stark hefted the bottle at him.

“Open it.” A raised eyebrow from Loki and Stark added, “Please.”

Loki cocked a grin and took the bottle, stroking fingers over the neck as he magically worked the cork out with a pop, and offered the bottle back to him. Stark's gaze lingered on Loki's fingers around the cork before he blinked and snatched the bottle.

“Thanks.” Stark took a mighty chug of the wine.

Loki sat, left side to the wall, so that he could face Stark. He folded legs in front of himself and rested hands in his own lap. He was within arm's reach but hopefully not so close as to annoy Stark.

Stark gave a happy groan as he lowered the bottle, humming at the light burn and bitter-sweet taste. Stark closed his eyes and tilted his head back, enjoying the sensation of the wine settling in his stomach. Loki's gaze lingered on the faint tint of red on Stark's pale lips.

Eventually Stark set the bottle aside and opened his eyes, working on the sandwich's wrapper next. It was easier to master and he soon took a large bite out of the side of it. Vegetables and bread crunched in the quiet interior of the ship. Stark took him in as he chewed and Loki suddenly didn't know where to look. He cast his gaze out over the unremarkable ship, feigning disinterest in the man before him.

Stark took him in a moment, then grunted, “So what's he like?” He took another large bite of his food.

Loki blinked and looked back to Stark. “Who?”

“Thanos,” Stark said around a full mouth.

Loki's features fell. This wasn't precisely a topic to calm Stark down further. “I don't know if this is the time-”

“Oh it's the fucking time.” Stark picked up the bottle and offered it to Loki. “Talk.”

“I...” he started to protest but Stark's gaze held him so firmly that he gave in. He waved off the wine and sighed, “He is relentless.”

Stark shrugged and took another swig for himself before resuming his sandwich.

Loki leaned further to his left against the wall, head resting against the cool metal, and dropped his gaze to his fingers. How to even truly manage to give Stark a real feel of the creature...

“He will stop at nothing,” Loki eventually said in a low voice. “There is nothing he wants more

than to cow you for your insolence in attempting to stop him, and to continue in his quest to create the ultimate weapon. He will come. He was far but the distance will not stop him. His arrival is inevitable. He will bring everything. He will not hold back. He will play out moves twelve turns in advance. He's calculating and convincing. He is ruthless." Loki released a long breath and then met Stark's thoughtful gaze. "I honestly did not spend much time with him. Not in person. I was handled by minions. I was merely a useful cog found floating through life, lost and tossed aside, something to be molded into his vision. I would like to say I took a while to bend to their will but I was eagerly keen to be done with their... methods. I consented. They promised me revenge and I pledged to him."

Stark turned a little toward him, frowning. "Their *methods*? You were held hostage?"

Loki blinked at the concern in Stark's voice. He attempted to shrug the concern off. "Of course. Mental and physical... magical... tortures no one else could dream up..." He trailed off, not able to state it so finely, and said instead, "I had no other way out, so I did as I was told."

"You didn't *really* want to conquer Earth?"

Loki shrugged. "If the universe was to fall to Thanos, why not enjoy my own tiny kingdom, hopefully too minor to gain his interest after he handed it to me."

"But if Thanos wasn't in the picture?"

"I had a throne once prior," Loki answered cryptically, thinking back to Thor's banishment. "It was not what I truly craved but I shall never gain that which I wanted."

Stark frowned at him. He pressed, "But if you didn't really want Earth, why not turn against Thanos, when you saw us fighting back? Covertly help somehow? Work with your brother?"

"Thanos would know. His minions were everywhere." When Stark didn't seem to understand, he added, pointing to his own head with his right hand. "Everywhere. They saw everything. Every step. Every word."

Stark blinked as recognition came to him. "You were bugged? Watched? Fuck."

Loki nodded.

Stark eyed him. "You're not still..."

Loki huffed. "No. It does not matter, however. He will find me. He will not be pleased at my failure."

"As I recall, after I threw a nuke at him, he couldn't really help you out with the wormhole destroyed. Maybe he won't blame you."

Loki laughed without humor. He curled his folded legs up against his stomach and the wall beside him. "If he is merciful, he will kill me swiftly, but I wholly doubt such a thing. No, I will die in agony after hours upon hours of..." He shuddered and closed his eyes, curling up further upon himself.

"Lokes," Stark soothed, shifting closer. He rested a hand against Loki's calf and squeezed. "He's not here. Not yet."

Loki's heart skipped at the touch but he repeated back, "Not yet."

Stark squeezed his leg again. “That's the best I can offer, long legs. Things are good. For now. We just gotta keep fighting.”

Some corner of him wanted to latch on to Stark's determination but he'd spent so many years resolved to simply marking time until Thanos arrived. He whispered dejectedly, “You will not win.”

“Still gotta fight,” Stark answered.

Loki opened his eyes and took in the man before him. There was so much fight and so much drive and so much panic and so much fear. It all roiled around in deep brown eyes into a stunning intensity.

“Every minute of every day,” Stark stated firmly. “Can't waste it. We got all this time to prepare for a reason. Gotta push. Gotta get it done.”

The hint of hope settled in Loki's stomach but he couldn't embrace it. His dejected eyes kept Stark's gaze but he didn't reply.

Stark sighed and squeezed his leg again. He brought his sandwich up for another bite with his free hand, keeping the one on Loki in place.

They sat in silence and the warmth of Stark's hand through the leg of his leather trousers was wondrous. He focused on the sensation and idly watched Stark finish his meal.

How did this mere mortal have the courage to fight against the inevitable?

A beep sounded muffled but in Stark's direction. Loki blinked, sorry to have Stark remove his hand from him, and watched the man tug a flat device from his back pocket. It flickered to life and a warm glow took over Stark's features.

The female voice from his suit spoke through the device, “Sorry, boss. The kid's in trouble.”

Stark set the last of his sandwich aside and sat upright away from the wall. “How much trouble we talking?”

“His signal disappeared. His last location was at a train yard in Newark.”

“What the hell is he doing in Jersey?” Stark snapped. “Alert Happy. I'm on my way but it's going to take me-”

“Two hours. I know, boss. Suit ramping up.”

“Send suits to the last location and start scouting. Hopefully they can find him before I get there.”

Stark stood and dashed for the gangway out.

Loki uncoiled his legs in a rush to follow after. “Wait, you're leaving?”

“Don't miss me too terribly,” Stark repeated Loki's line from earlier, then added, “Gotta find the kid before he gets himself into real trouble.”

“Who's *the kid*?”

“Long story.” Stark marched up to his suit and it unfolded itself. He turned around to step back into it. “No time. I've got the Atlantic to cross so just tell Bruce-”

“Where is Newark?” Loki interrupted. “I can get us there.”

“*You* can get us there?” The suit molded around Stark and the helm snapped down into place over his surprised features. He held up his right forearm and a panel slid open, a floating display coming up with coordinates and a map. His voice rang out from the suit, “It’s nearish New York City. You should know where that is.”

Loki studied the map. “I do indeed. Hold still.” He placed a hand on the suit’s left shoulder and coiled green energy in his free hand as he prepared to teleport them.

“Wait what are you doing?”

A flash of green light was the only answer as they blinked away.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is where the [cover art](#) comes from.

Chapter 6

They blinked into being atop a flat rooftop, squat sad buildings surrounding them, the faint clunk of a train rolling past beyond. Train cars and cargo sat waiting below their roof filling the yard. They'd moved far enough around the planet to witness the autumn sun setting once again.

Stark staggered and stepped away from Loki. His helm retracted and he looked around in astonishment at their surroundings. Loki couldn't help the smallest of smug grins at the sight. He did love an appreciative audience.

"Son of a bitch." He marveled at Loki a moment, then looked down at the readout of coordinates on his forearm. "This is his last known location."

"As requested."

Stark cocked a grin. "Fuck, you're gonna come in handy." He huffed a laugh in relief and refocused himself. He cast a look around the rooftop and then over the edge. "Start scans, Friday. Where are the boys?"

"The bots are arriving in two minutes. You beat them, boss."

"For once." He tossed Loki a grin, then jumped off the rooftop to the ground below. "Get me Happy."

Loki leaped after him and shimmered into place his horned helm, pulling out a knife simply to have it at hand. The location wasn't precisely welcoming.

A male voice rang out from Stark's suit. "Tony, I had no idea he'd actually go-"

Stark interrupted. "Skip the excuses, Happy. What was he workin' on?"

"There's someone smuggling tech to Wakanda."

"Smuggling tech to Africa by *train*?" Stark harassed.

"No, it gets there and they box it onto boats. He's obsessed with cleaning up everything after Vulture."

"Kid's holding grudges already," Stark sighed, looking drained a moment.

Loki glanced up as Stark's robots arrived, fanning out overhead to begin scans.

"Just trying to clean up his mess, I think," Happy replied. "He said something about an underground stash. If it's heavy duty it could be why he went off the grid."

Loki nodded. He could sense tunnels beneath them. "There is an entrance this way." He stepped around Stark and made his way between two train cars to another building.

"Who was that?" Happy wondered at the sound of Loki's voice.

"I'll explain later." Stark ended the call and finished his scans as he followed after Loki. "There's a few other entrances but that's probably the one he took." His helm slid back into place. "Try not to kill anyone. They're smugglers, not criminal masterminds."

“If they are foolish enough to engage me, I shall defend myself.” Loki stalked his way into the building through a propped open door and down a series of concrete stairs.

Stark followed after with a grumbled, “Fantastic.”

The stairs went down for multiple floors, twisting around and around as they went down, before opening out to a long corridor. There was a distant sound of yelling.

“That'll be our boy's work,” Stark said, taking off to fly down the corridor.

Loki huffed at being left behind but kept up his steady pace. Stark could likely handle himself against petty criminals. He heard a startled shout as Stark disappeared into the room beyond. Loki cocked a grin at the scream that followed. He arrived a few moments later, the long corridor coming to a large open storage space filled with crates and equipment. A dozen men were scattered through the room, mostly in a panic. One was knocked out on the floor, likely Stark's handwork, and another pair were tied together with some sort of sticky material.

“Mister Stark, I've got this handled!” came a disconcertingly young voice from above. Loki looked up to see a red and blue suited youth hanging upside down from the ceiling.

Stark floated near him and fired off another concussive shot, knocking back a man onto a pile of boxes. “You're not even supposed to leave New York City, underoos!”

“It was a last minute thing, I swear!”

One of the criminals shouted up at them and hefted a large, familiar looking weapon. Was that Chitauri tech? As it fired, the energy blast was confirmation enough of its origins. Stark and the child scattered, the youth spinning down to land on a crate and web another to the floor. Loki frowned and crossed the room with a thought, startling the criminal as he appeared before him in a blink. He ripped the weapon from his hands and then bashed the man in the face with the butt of it, knocking him down.

Loki snarled as the man dropped to his knees in pain, “Where did you acquire this?”

“Dude, these guns are all over the place, that's why I'm here.” The child landed beside him. He swiftly webbed the criminal on his knees and then tilted his head at Loki. “Hey, don't I know you from somewhere?”

“Less chatter, more web slinging,” Stark butted in. “Get the last of them incapacitated and then we'll talk.”

Even beneath the suit, Loki could see the young man wince at the tone to Stark's voice. “Yes sir,” he muttered and rushed off from Loki, throwing more goo on the nearest thief, wrapping him up all around the midsection.

Loki inspected the weapon in his hands. It was part Chitauri, part Human meddling. Had the invasion left so much behind? He supposed there had been a sizable force at the time but nothing like what Thanos had promised. Thankfully, in the end.

A smuggler came around a storage box and attempted to tackle him from behind. Loki left a clone behind and teleported back a step, sighing as the would be attacker fell onto his face when tackling nothing. He thumped the fool across the back of the head with the Chitauri weapon and he slumped unconscious.

This was ridiculously beneath him. “Positively pathetic.”

“I told you, I had this!” the child squeaked.

“One would hope,” Loki countered.

“They’re smugglers not assassins,” Stark corrected. The youth webbed up one more and Stark wondered, “That all of them?”

Loki reached out with his mind and heaved a sigh. “Two more yet cower in the adjoining room. Shall I?”

“Web ‘em up, underoos.”

Loki pointed toward the door and the youth leaped up, swung across the space of the cargo hold on a strand of his webbing, and then landed through the doorway with a “Hey guys!” Two surprised shouts swiftly followed.

“Friday, get the boys down here. Put a call in with the local police but first make sure we get the weapons safely out of here to storage.”

“Got it, boss.”

Loki raised an eyebrow at him. “You were going to fly two hours to see to *this*?”

Stark shrugged in his suit. “Kid went off the grid. I worry.”

“Speaking of, you’re starting a child army against Thanos now?”

Stark barked a laughed.

The child in question landed beside them. “Hey I’m no kid, I’m fifteen!”

Loki rolled his eyes even as he said, “My sincerest apologies.”

“You,” Stark said, pointing a gloved finger at the youth. “Outside. Talk. Now.”

“But Mister Stark-” he squeaked in protest.

“Now.”

Chapter 7

Robots hustled down the stairwell as they made their way back outside in silence. Loki briefly wondered how Stark controlled so many, and once again thought over the sheer number he must have stashed around the globe. After the earlier panic attack, however, Loki no longer wondered why they existed.

Stark took off for the rooftop they'd arrived upon. The youth quite literally climbed and hopped his way up the side of the building. He was talented. Loki followed after but stayed away from the pair by a number of meters, giving them space, while still eavesdropping. He sat on the roof's stone railing and took in the deep oranges of the last gasps of the sunset.

The helm to Stark's suit retracted as he said, "You're supposed to call in backup when you leave New York City."

"I know, I know!" The youth tugged off his helm and he looked even younger with his brown hair going every which way. "I didn't know they'd lead me this far out, but it's just Jersey, and they were no big deal."

"You didn't know that! What if they were meeting with a crime boss? What if they had guys who actually knew how to use those damn guns?"

"I've fought guys with those guns before," the boy grumbled, attempting to fix his hair. "And I scouted them out before I attacked. If they were anything major, I'd have called for backup."

"After going that deep underground? Why do you think I showed up? You went off the grid and out of comms range."

"I did?" He looked down at his helm in his hands. "Karen didn't?"

"She's a tool, not a babysitter," Stark snapped.

The boy's shoulders slumped. "Sorry Mister Stark..."

Stark released a long, exhausted breath and rubbed a gloved hand against his temples. "It's okay. I'm glad everything was fine. Just, be more careful, and *call it in* when you leave New York City. Period."

"I promise. I swear it." He looked up at a clearly tired Stark and wondered, "I thought you were in Paris with the clean energy summit?"

"I was."

"Then how are you here?"

Stark's gaze narrowed on him. "Did you pull this because you didn't think I was in New York?"

The boy flushed as his eyes went wide. "No! No, I didn't mean it like that!"

Stark sighed at the child and tilted his head toward Loki. "I've made new talented friends."

Something warm glowed within Loki at the statement but he dryly met the youth's gaze.

The young man frowned a little at him. "Do I know him? I feel like I should know him..."

Loki stood with a graceful half bow and came up to the pair. "Loki, formerly of Asgard, but seeing as it no longer exists, I suppose I'm now Loki of Earth."

"Asgard? Like Thor?"

Loki struggled not to make a face at the immediate impulse of everyone to namedrop Thor upon meeting him. He only half succeeded in masking the annoyed wince.

Stark chuckled a laugh. "He's Thor's brother."

"Adopted brother," Loki corrected. "And you are?"

"Spider-man," the boy said proudly, standing up straighter. Then with a quick glance to Stark, he added, "You can call me Peter."

"A pleasure, Peter."

The boy's gaze lingered up at Loki's helm. There was something about it that drew his attention.

Stark attempted to redraw his focus. "You got homework tonight, short stuff?"

"Just some stupid math sheet. It'll take me two minutes." He narrowed his gaze and said, "I swear I've seen you before."

Stark countered, "You got a class on Norse mythology?"

"No..." Then it clicked for him and Peter took a step back. "The attack on New York!" He crouched and struck a defensive pose.

Loki sighed, "I told Thor that Earth wasn't the best place for me."

"Nonsense." Stark shot Peter a look. "Calm down, underoos."

"But he was working with the aliens!"

"*Was* being the operative word there, kiddo." Stark took a protective step in front of Loki. "He's with us now. You can ask Thor all about it later."

Stark's defense and acceptance of him was actually touching. Loki's lips curled into a smile as he looked down.

Peter took him in a long moment, gaze shifting back and forth between Stark and Loki, before slowly standing upright again out of his pose. "You're sure?"

Stark cast a look at Loki, a glint of something in his eyes, before he turned back to Peter. "Quite."

Loki dropped his gaze down further to his feet in an effort to hide a growing smile.

"Okay..." Peter said cautiously, still taking in Loki. "Okay cool." He tilted his head. "Wait, did you say Asgard is gone? Like gone gone?"

Loki nodded, looking up with a mostly schooled face. "Indeed. It was the only way to defeat our sister."

"You guys have a sister?!"

“It was news to us as well, I assure you.”

“So wait, Thor's here too?” Peter looked around as if expecting him to float down from the skies.

“He's in Norway, but yeah,” Stark answered. “They're building a new home there. We'll take you when it's not a school night.”

“Really?!” Peter lit up. “Awesome!”

Loki raise an eyebrow. “It's not truly exciting. It's mostly tents at this point.”

“But Thor is amazing!”

Loki didn't even bother to suppress an eyeroll at the statement. Children.

“Next weekend maybe, huh?” Stark promised, then cast a look at Loki. “Can you get us back to New York so we can drop him off.”

Loki raise an eyebrow but was pleased to be asked. “Anywhere in particular?”

Stark pulled up his holographic map once more and pointed at a coordinate. “There work?”

“Indeed. Hold still.” He placed a hand on Stark's armored bicep. Peter blinked at Loki's hand on his shoulder, going tense in confusion.

“What's going-”

A flicker of green light and they reappeared on a rooftop in Queens. Loki released both of them.

“-on...” Peter finished his sentence with a dropped jaw at the familiar cityscape. He looked down at the roof, then back up at Loki. “This is my building!”

Loki shrugged nonchalantly but ate up the astonishment written all over Peter's features.

Stark cocked a grin. “Call it an early night, huh? Or I'll have to check in on hot Aunt May.”

Loki raised a mildly jealous eyebrow.

Peter's face fell. “No! Please don't tell her I went to Newark!”

“Promise. So long as you fucking follow the rules.”

“I swear!” Peter tugged his mask back on and leaped off the building shouting back, “Get some rest too, Mister Stark! Jetlag is killer!”

Stark grumbled at the parting words.

Loki looked over the edge of the building to see the child land on the side of it and slip into an opened window. “He's not wrong.”

“Shut up.”

Loki shot Stark with a stern look. “You most certainly require rest.”

Stark snapped irritably, “You just want to head back so Thor has no idea we left.”

“He has no reason to be upset by my departure,” Loki evaded. “I have my chaperon.”

Stark huffed. "I'm just a walking hall pass?" Loki's brow furrowed, not understanding, and Stark sighed and gave in. "Fine." He tossed a look to Loki. "But I'm drinking the rest of that wine first."

It was pitch darkness when they reappeared at the tents. Loki saw to Stark fetching his wine before going to his tent with a soundly sleeping Banner. He was tempted to loom until Stark was truly asleep, in hopes to keep him from running off to tinker more rather than rest, but the man seemed to be giving in to his fatigue with every sip of wine, so Loki left him to it.

Thor was still snoring.

Loki shot the unconscious lump an annoyed glare as he settled on his own cot. He closed his eyes but it took quite some time for him to sleep. Thoughts continued to tumble through his mind but most centered around Stark.

Chapter 8

Progress was steady. Craftsmen began work the next day on New Asgard's buildings and most every able bodied person helped with construction. It was swift work. Stark and Norway could hardly keep up with demand for materials. Thor deferred to builders to lead but worked alongside their people, still having valuable skill with a hammer. Magic was used to help move and place pieces. Loki did his best to help but his brand of magic was not the same as the craftsmen.

Mainly he distractedly looked for Stark but the man was either overseeing construction of the Avengers' building or huddled with Banner doing whatever it was they did together. Suits, as Stark called them, and a delegation from Norway arrived in the afternoon, but Stark did most of the schmoozing with them until they left promising more supplies. And when Loki did spot Stark later, Thor was quick to intercede, dragging Loki back to the work at hand.

The day disappeared at a gratingly slow pace, and when Thor was eventually deep asleep, Loki found Stark still working with Banner on recreating the ship's backup power cores. He lurked magically unseen in the shadows, listening in.

“It wasn't an extended vacation, Tony.”

Stark shrugged as he poked at their prototype. “Sounds like it was. I hope Hulk got plenty of fawning fans sneaking into his bedroom. Gladiator style orgies. The works.”

“Dude!”

“What? The big guy deserved to have a little fun.”

“I don't remember two years! Stop joking about this.” Banner croaked. “And if he did, he probably split them open!”

“Oh don't be so harsh on the guy. He can be gentle when he wants to be.”

“You're fucking ridiculous.”

There was a beat of silence. Loki leaned against a far wall, double checking his glamour keeping himself invisible.

Stark's voice was much more serious, a low warm hum, as he wondered, “You contact Nat yet?”

Banner frowned down at the table and folded his arms across his chest defensively. “No.”

“She'd probably love to know you're back.”

“You told me she's a double agent. Working with Steve, against you and the accords. She might not be in hiding with them but she's on thin ice. I don't think... I don't think it would be a good idea to talk with her.”

Tony soothed, eyes on his work, “She'd be Team Hulk if she knew you were back.”

“Would she *really*?” Banner shook his head. “I don't know if I can trust her, Tony.”

“You can't know till you try.” There was something meaningful in Stark's voice. It tugged at Loki. “Gotta leap and see if they'll catch you.”

Banner went quiet, mulling the idea over. Eventually he sighed and turned for the exit. "I'm gonna sleep. Don't stay up all night. I'll know if you don't sleep."

Stark merely grunted in response, focused on his work. Banner walked past Loki without a second glance and disappeared down the gangway.

Loki lurked a while longer, enjoying the sight of Stark's arms in the tank top. Clothing for all had arrived earlier in the day. The fresh black tank highlighted shoulders and strong arms. Stark worked diligently. He was... enthralling. The focus. The drive. The determination. The strength. The mind. The skill. The push through pain into action. For a mortal he was remarkable, but even if he were Asgardian, he would be a wonder. Part of him wondered if the man was truly mortal...

He shrugged off his invisibility and stepped forward into the light. Stark pulled open the device and prodded it with a tool. Loki's booted footsteps echoed in the quiet cargo ship. He circled around to the other side of the makeshift desk.

"Done lurking, Lokes?" Stark said, not looking away from his work.

Loki ignored the hint that Stark at least suspected he'd been watching and instead offered, "My brother wished to discuss things before he finally set to snoring."

"Did he?" Stark tossed a quick look up at Loki. "You two have a nice heart to heart?"

Loki sighed. "He is an idiot."

"Aren't all siblings?"

"You have your own?"

"Nope." Stark set his tool aside and leaned upright, meeting Loki's gaze. "I'm a spoiled only child."

"What I would not give."

Stark huffed a laugh. "Liar."

Loki raised a defiant eyebrow.

"I see you two together. You might complain but you work well together. You're brothers, through and through, and don't toss the adopted line out again, it doesn't matter. Not to him and most definitely not to you. You being here with him is proof enough."

Loki ignored the accurate assumptions and instead muttered slyly, "There are other reasons I'm here..." He cast a meaningful glance at Stark.

"I'm merely a happy distraction," Stark teased in return.

"More than mere distraction." Loki stepped around to Stark's side of the table and came to stand closer beside him than was necessary. He leaned forward to look at the prototype. "How goes the reconstruction?"

Stark stared with interest at the way Loki's hair fell forward before coming back to himself. "Getting there. It's got some quirks keeping it from booting up."

"Quirks?"

Stark shrugged. "Shit I don't understand yet."

“You will master it.”

Stark's gaze lingered on his features in the low light. “Thanks for the vote of confidence, Lokes.” He dragged his gaze away and rubbed at the back of his neck. “So what did you and Thor talk about anyway?”

Loki blinked at their returning to the topic. He sighed and straightened again, leaning a hip against the table as he turned to Stark. “Mostly the death of our father.”

Stark winced. “Oh yeah. Sorry about that, by the way.”

Loki shrugged, folding arms over his chest. “He was ancient. It was not a surprise.”

“He was still your dad.”

“Barely.”

“He raised you, that's what counts.”

“*My mother* raised me. He merely tolerated me, when not sentencing me to eternity in a dungeon.”

Loki expected Stark to rebuke his comments, to restate Odin's impact on Loki's life, to push the narrative that Odin cared for him. Instead, however, Stark released a heavy sigh and pulled himself up onto the table to sit, legs dangling over the edge. “Even if he was an asshole, you're still gonna miss him.” He cast a look up at Loki. “I miss mine and he was a fucker.”

There was a heaviness in Stark's eyes. Loki released a sigh and glanced down, unable to keep his gaze.

“It's okay to miss him,” Stark said softly. “It's okay to mourn him. You don't have to like him to acknowledge he was a part of your life.”

“Now who's trying to be a therapist?” Loki said, echoing Stark's words from the evening before. He hugged himself with arms over his chest. It was long minutes of silence before Loki whispered, “I don't miss him. I miss my mother. I miss her voice. I miss her presence. I miss the way she looked at me. No one sees me as she did...”

Stark's voice was wistful as he replied, “My mom was the only one really there for me. I should've appreciated her so much more when she was here. I always took for granted her being there for me.”

Loki nodded though he kept his face down and away from Stark. “I thought she would always be there.”

“Then she was gone.”

“Lost in an instant.” Pain stabbed at Loki. He closed his eyes against it. “I couldn't help. I didn't help. I didn't stop them.”

“Don't start down that road,” Stark warned.

“I should've broken free. I should've stopped them.”

“You didn't know what they were going to do.”

“I still should've protected her!” Loki slumped down onto his knees and sat back on his heels. “She

is gone because of me.”

“She is not,” Stark stated firmly. He slid off the table and onto his knees in front of Loki. “You didn't know.”

“I told them where to find Odin.” Loki's pained features looked up to meet Stark's concerned gaze. He'd told no one of this but Stark's presence seemed to pull the words out, guilt washing over him. “I wanted him attacked. I wanted to hurt *him*, not her.”

Stark stared at the revelation but warm hands still reached to squeeze Loki's upper arms. “You didn't know where they'd end up. It's not your fault.”

“But it is...” Loki whispered dreadfully.

“It fucking isn't. They would've found their way there on their own. She wouldn't blame you.”

“You don't know-”

“I do know. I've spent a fucking lifetime wishing I could've stopped my parents from walking out that door but I can't change it. You can't change it. It was not your fault.”

“I told them-”

“You were angry. You were hurt.”

Trembling took over Loki. “She died.”

Stark's hands moved to Loki's cheeks, cupping them gently. “It was *not* your fault, Loki. If you weren't in prison. If Thor had been paying better attention. If you never got captured by the Chitauri. If if if. It's pointless. No one but her killer is to blame.”

Loki tilted his head into Stark's right hand. His voice was a low growl as he declared, “And I killed him.”

“Better than I've managed,” Stark reassured. He brushed thumbs along Loki's cheeks. “All I could do was rip his metal arm off.”

It still hurt. It still ached. But he tried to latch onto Stark's reassurances. The man continued to caress his cheeks as Loki slowly relaxed.

Stark murmured low, both soothing and teasing at the same time, “We're both fucked.”

Loki's lips curled into a small smile despite everything. He opened his eyes to take in Stark. His eyes shone with understanding. He couldn't recall anyone looking at him so, not since his mother...

“I am so very glad to know you, Tony.”

Stark smiled softly back at him. “Feeling's mutual, Lokes.” He released his hold on Loki's cheeks and instead brushed Loki's hair back behind an ear.

Loki blushed lightly despite it all. His heart hammered at the gentle touch. He lost himself in Stark's deep brown eyes, so understanding, so forgiving.

A quiet moment passed and then Stark wondered, “You tell your brother about all this?”

Loki shook his head. Thor would be furious with him to know he might have played even the

smallest of roles, even if Loki himself could rail against Thor doing nothing to protect her while their home was overrun.

Stark drank in the sight of his distress and soothed, “I won’t tell him.”

His voice was quiet as he replied, “Thank you.”

“You should probably talk about your mom some time with him but I’m no fucking good at being a therapist either so take that advice with a grain of salt.” He paused before he soothed, “Your mom would be proud of you.”

Loki warmed at the thought. He would give anything to hear his mother say so to him one more time. He whispered back to Stark, “As would yours.”

Stark smiled a little and glanced down at his hands as they dropped to his lap. “I hope so.”

“I know so.”

They both went quiet, lost in their mutual thoughts, most running parallel to one another. They were more alike than Loki realized. Stark slumped sideways and leaned against the box which made the base of the makeshift table above. He cocked an eyebrow at Loki and wondered, “There any more wine hiding around here you can scrounge up?”

Loki huffed a chuckle and shifted to sit beside Stark, shoulder resting against the other man’s, and reached out with his magic for another bottle. He magicked the cork free, caressing long fingers against the neck. Stark’s attention was once again riveted to the teasing action. He offered the open bottle to Stark but he nudged it back to Loki.

“You first.”

Loki shrugged and took a long swig, though it was nothing compared to Asgardian wine. He still sighed at the gentle burn of alcohol down his throat and offered the bottle to Stark. The man took it this time and together they worked on the bottle, passing it back and forth. The silence was comfortable. They both relaxed against one another. Stark’s thigh pressed to his. The man’s shoulder leaned heavier against his own. Loki took yet another swig and realized as he brought the bottle down that Stark was resting his head on his shoulder.

He was more exhausted than he let on. Loki set the bottle of wine aside. A few heartbeats later and he could feel Stark drift to sleep. Something warm and ridiculous coiled in Loki’s stomach at the sensation. Stark felt comfortable enough to sleep right like this? Beside him? How had he earned such trust?

Stark’s words to Banner earlier on trusting echoed in his mind. He leaned back against Stark, cheek against his hair. He would prove Stark right to place such trust in him. So few ever gave him such a chance.

Chapter 9

He woke to the thunderous sound of his own name. “*Loki!*” He blinked blurry eyes open to see Thor looming overhead. Loki was still seated with Stark on the floor of the cargo ship. Stark was curled against him, arms around his midsection, and face buried in Loki’s neck. He supposed it did look rather incriminating.

“Brother, I promise you, I’ve done nothing-”

“You’ve done plenty,” Thor growled, reaching to jerk Loki up onto his feet.

Stark startled awake as his living body pillow disappeared. He squinted up at Thor. “Hey, point break.” He yawned and stretched. “Aren’t you two a little old to be playing protective big brother?”

“I am not protecting *him*,” Thor muttered. He dragged Loki off by the arm.

Loki winced at the bright morning light outside. “You’re being ridiculous.”

“Am I?” He tossed him an unbelieving look. “So it just *happens* that you wish to befriend Stark? It has nothing whatsoever to do with his position? His command over your time here?”

“By your logic, I should be seducing Strange,” Loki countered sharply. “He’s the one able to free me from this bargain.”

Thor laughed humorlessly as he continued to drag Loki through the makeshift streets. “Perhaps he’s next.”

“Is it so odd that I might wish to befriend *someone*?”

“It is odd that you wish to befriend *him*.”

“Is it? Is it so odd I would find solace in him?”

Thor stopped and turned to him. “Solace?”

Loki meaningfully raised his chin.

Thor took him in a moment. “You have both been through much, I will grant you such.” Then he narrowed his gaze on Loki. “But you are still to stay away from him.”

Loki rolled his eyes.

The rest of the day and the next few days to follow passed with Thor glued to Loki’s side and interrupting any attempts of talking with Stark. Each evening Banner and Stark made more progress on their recreation of the power core. Loki lurked so long as Banner was present. He was still... uncomfortable around Banner. Most nights he was able to talk with Stark and it inevitably ended with a bottle of wine and a warm Stark curled against his side. Loki allowed the man rest for a few hours before slipping away and returning to his bunk. Stark seemed not to mind, after the fuss Thor threw the first morning.

One night Loki collapsed onto his cot, exhausted from using magic all day, though two buildings were nearly finished. As Thor began to snore, he thought of going to check in on Stark, but it was much later than usual and the day caught up with him.

He was just starting to drift off when a hand clasped over his mouth. Loki's eyes shot open, hand reaching for his dagger, when he recognized Stark hovering over him, finger to his own lips. Loki nodded and Stark removed his hand. He motioned for Loki to follow and crept back out of the tent.

Loki's heart hammered as he carefully slipped from bed and joined Stark outside. Stark walked them through the dark toward the commotion of his robots at work, likely to hide their voices.

“Why didn't you come find me again?”

“Thor had us working into the night.”

Stark raised an eyebrow. “What's with your big bro anyway?”

Loki clasped his hands behind himself and attempted nonchalance. “He believes I am attempting to corrupt you into granting me favors and perhaps freedom from Strange's bargain.”

Stark barked a laugh. “He thinks you're gonna seduce me out of everything?”

“More or less.”

Something sparkled in Stark's eyes in the low light. There was a drawn out moment of silence that made Loki's heart stammer before Stark leaned forward and said, “Let's get out of here.”

Loki stared a moment, certain he'd heard the man incorrectly, and then managed softly, “Where?”

“Anywhere.”

Chapter 10

The weather was frigid when they arrived. Loki wrapped himself in a heavy charcoal, woolen coat over his Midgardian black suit, adding an appropriate puffy black parka onto Stark, a red beanie atop his head. Stark cast a look around, then down at himself.

“Not bad, Lokes.” Stark took a long look over Loki in his suit and then stuffed his hands in his parka's pockets. He looked around at their snow dusted surroundings, streets lit warmly with a quaint row of quiet homes before them. “But you would pick somewhere somehow colder than Norway.”

“Reykjavik,” Loki revealed. “And it only feels colder because of the snowfall.”

“Sticking to your Nordic roots?”

Loki cocked a grin and shrugged, leading them forward along the sidewalk. “It's always been a favorite.” He tossed him a mildly concerned glance. “Will it do?”

Stark's gaze slid appreciatively down Loki as he answered, “Definitely.”

Loki's heart skipped but he focused ahead on their destination. They turned a corner and found themselves at the top of a hillside overlooking the bay. It was a gorgeous sight with the light layer of snow. Loki's longer legs stepped ahead of Stark as they arrived at a pub, reaching to open the door for them.

It was an old pub. Leather seats. Weathered bar. Wood paneling. Regulars sipping pints. A group of men playing darts in a corner. A quiet and dark atmosphere. Warm and relaxed. Loki strode his way to the bar, Stark following after. He ordered them both their best scotch, earning a cocked grin from Stark, before walking them to a quiet corner booth. Coats were shrugged off and hung up before Loki slid in first, taking in Stark as he joined him while tugging off his beanie.

“A man after my own heart,” Stark sighed, settling close on the rounded booth. He sniffed the tumbler of scotch before taking a sip.

Loki shifted to rest his knee to Stark's. “I thought you might approve. You had quite the bar at Stark Tower, as I recall.”

Stark chuckled. “Finally having that proper drink with me?”

Loki smirked at him over the rim of his glass.

Both took a moment to enjoy their drinks and take in their surroundings. No one seemed to notice them whatsoever. Loki relaxed back against the leather padded booth. It smelled lightly of polish and weathering. His gaze wandered to Stark beside him. He could pick out a few gray hairs here and there in the warm light, mostly in the sides of his goatee. Mortals aged so swiftly... yet he looked appealing with the splash of gray, though he doubted Stark would agree.

Stark rubbed a thumb along the rim of his glass. Loki's eyes drank in the sight of his worn fingers caressing the glass. Stark eventually turned to him and his eyes were all the more amber in the bar's dim lights. His voice was a lovely low rumble but the words were a bit of a surprise. “Do you really think Thanos is a lost cause?”

Loki blinked, seeing the worry etched on Stark's features. Was this truly the topic he wished to

start with? He was hoping for something simpler. Loki sighed and leaned forward, resting forearms on the table. He cupped long fingers around his drink and stared down at it. "Yes."

"He underestimated us once before."

"He will hold nothing back. He will not relent."

"He doesn't have to relent. We stop him. We beat him. Whatever it takes." Stark tapped fingers against the table in agitation. "What would it take?"

"I don't..." Loki sighed and shook his head. He could not hand Stark the answers he wanted to hear. He met Stark's gaze with honest hopelessness. "An army. A horde. A hundred Hulks. He will have so many with him and he will rip the Earth to pieces to get what he craves."

"Then we focus on him and him alone. His minions will scatter if we take him out."

The man was relentless himself. The drive to find a way to best that which could not be bested. It was a marvel to see. That drive, so firm and yet desperate in Stark's eyes.

"If you could even get to him."

"You kidding me? I throw a Hulk at his ship and he shreds the walls straight inside till he finds him."

Loki huffed a little laugh at the mental picture. "Assuming such a thing happens, then perhaps. It would take many of you to best him. More than who fought me. And plenty will perish."

Stark's jaw set. "So long as he went down."

"Are you recruiting more than mere children?"

"I've got my eye on a few." He cast a meaningful look at Loki.

Loki swallowed at the idea of battling Thanos' forces. All in all, his magic was to deceive, to sidestep battle, to surprise and disappear again. He knew starkly that he could not beat back Thanos or his minions. He'd tried to once before. Yet if anyone could talk him into trying again, it would be the determined man beside him.

Loki's keen mind rolled over ideas on how they might best Thanos himself. He sighed, "And where are the rest of the Avengers? It cannot be the handful of us plus a child."

"Rhodey's working a desk job. Vision's got some personal project he's focused on. Black Panther's running a country."

Loki waited for more but they did not come. He prompted, "And the rest?"

"MIA." Stark's features hardened. He nursed his drink.

Loki raised an eyebrow. "Even the buffoon with his shield?"

"Especially him," Stark grumbled, and grudgingly smirked at Loki's apt assessment. "His people will probably help but they can't be trusted."

Loki thought back to the conversation overheard with Banner. Was that what they were discussing? The weight of the world settled onto Stark's shoulders once more. But what sort of falling out did they have? They'd formed as a solid team by the end of his failed attempt to take over Earth. What

had that shield wielding idiot done to him to cause such a rift?

Loki attempted to brush past the topic of their fracturing. “How many are they?”

“Six, give or take.”

“That makes for slightly over a dozen of us.” Loki frowned. “Is that all? You still believe we can best Thanos?”

“Well, Hulk counts for like ten, so.”

“Tony.”

“I’m working on it.” The man cast him a look. “My last few recruits are pretty fucking fantastic.”

Loki rolled his eyes but still warmed at the compliment.

“I *do* have feelers out. There’s another handful waiting in the wings that aren’t ready for prime time yet but they’ll be useful.” Stark downed his drink and hissed at the burn down his throat before he added, “And a smaller strike team is better anyway. We’re not fighting the whole damn army. We’re taking out the head of the beast.”

Loki nodded but he was still unconvinced. It was the longest of shots. Stark slid out of the booth with his now empty glass and walked his way to the bar. Loki watched absently. It was likely to be a suicide mission. Even if they could get to Thanos, Stark greatly underestimated his power. Yet if even one of them succeeded in the end... if someone could stop him...

Stark returned with the whole bottle of expensive scotch, setting it on the table. How was he not surprised. He idly thanked Stark as the man topped him off again and refilled his own tumbler.

They went quiet, each nursing their drinks.

Even if Stark had his eye on more heroes, they’d have no more than two dozen against Thanos himself. Likely less after fighting their way to him. It was not enough and yet he latched onto Stark’s conviction. Hope rolled around inside his heart.

Stark looked drained but determined. His jaw was set and his features firm. He would will this to go well, if he could. Such sheer determination sent something fluttering in Loki. Stark looked stunning in the warm glow of the lights. His mind clearly working over options, calculating ideas, taking in Loki’s words and twisting them toward a positive end. He was like no other.

Loki slid closer still, pressing his thigh fully against Stark’s, and the man turned magnetic amber eyes to meet his own. Loki leaned in closer still. He whispered in a adoring tone, “If anyone can defeat that which comes for us, it would be you. I don’t know how I believe it but I do.”

Stark was so close. Eyes big and beautiful beneath long lashes. His voice rumbled most fantastically, “Only happening with you along for the ride, Lokes.”

“Such confidence in my abilities,” Loki purred.

Stark’s hand reached to twist fingers around Loki’s black tie, tugging gently. “Very confident.”

The whole room faded as his heart hammered. He couldn’t resist. Not any longer. Loki kept Stark’s gaze as he leaned in the remaining distance and pressed his lips to other man’s. Stark immediately tilted his head and parted his lips. Relief and exultation washed over him. He closed his eyes and

parted his own lips, teasing his tongue over Stark's lower lip before dipping further beyond. Stark's low rumbling into the kiss was delicious. His tongue teased over his own. Testing brushes. Teasing flicks. Loki sucked on Stark's lower lip and another deeper groan sent butterflies fluttering.

The kiss lingered on. Fingers wrapped around Loki's tie twisted yet tighter. The wet smack of lips together was all that rang through Loki's ears. He'd not thoroughly kissed someone like this in ages. The gentle rub of Stark's goatee against his skin was intoxicating. He tilted his head further and deepened the kiss more, lips promising all he wished to do, a hand moving to slide over Stark's shirt, rubbing along chest to curl around the back of Stark's neck.

The move had the opposite reaction than what he was hoping for, however. Stark grunted and parted the kiss, pulling back. Loki opened his eyes to see Stark looking almost ashen.

What had he done wrong?

Stark released his hold on Loki's tie, shifting away down the rounded bench. Loki released his hold on him and stuttered a confused, "I-I'm sorry if I—"

"It's not you." Stark winced and scrubbed hands over his face in an effort to hide. "I can't believe... I thought I was good but I just can't..." He dropped his head down onto the table and covered it with his arms.

Loki stared a moment, dumbfounded at the turn of events, but not about to be put off so easily. Not after all they had shared. He slid close again and rubbed a hand to Stark's shoulder. "I do not expect anything more than your company tonight."

"I'm fucked up company," Stark muttered into the table. Still, he did not pull away from Loki's touch. "I'm fucked up. Fuck."

"Tony," Loki soothed. "Everything is fine."

"*Nothing* is fine," he growled. "This is just gonna end up a mess. I can't do this. I'll fuck it up and—"

"Slow that mind of yours down," Loki shushed. "You will ruin nothing."

"I always ruin it!" He snapped upright and shot Loki a glare. "Look at me fucking ruining it right now by nearly having a panic attack at a goddamn kiss."

Who told him he ruins everything? Who hurt him? Anger bubbled up in Loki but he pushed it aside to mull over later.

"Then we shall go slower."

"It's not the pace. It's..." He trailed off and punched the table with his fist in frustration, glasses clattering and drawing looks their way. "Just fucking forget all this. I'm a broken mess and you shouldn't bother, alright? It's been nice. Real nice. But I'm no good for a lay or anything else." He slid out of the booth and reached for his parka, storming for the door.

Loki frowned and swiftly followed after, grabbing his own coat. He set more than enough bills on the table for their drinks and rushed after.

It was all the colder as he shrugged on his coat. He spotted Stark marching down the hillside and darted after him.

"Let's go back," Stark barked, though he didn't stop his panicked pace forward down the street.

“Anthony-”

“You don’t get to call me Anthony, alright?! Nothing happened. We can forget it. I’m an asshole. You can seduce someone else. It’ll be fine.”

“Stark,” Loki snapped, grabbing his arm and stopping his frantic march away from him. “You will not be rid of my company so easily.”

“But I’m a fucking mess!” Stark shouted at him. “I’m no good at this. I’m no fucking good at this. You’ll end up hating me!” Panic began to overflow on Stark’s features. His breathing rapidly increased.

Loki looked around and spotted a bench lightly covered in snow. He pulled the man with him over to it, dusting off the snow with bare hands, before sitting Stark down. “Breathe, Stark.”

There was a hiccuced sob as Stark struggled to follow his command.

Loki emphasized his own breathing, rubbing at the man’s back through the parka.

Stark closed his eyes but the panic slowly backed away.

Eventually he sighed, “You must be fucking desperate for a lay, Lokes.”

Loki frowned at the comment and reassured, “I am not interested in mere carnal delights.”

The words had the opposite effect he intended. Stark winced and opened pained eyes at him. “You can’t be serious. I’m a mess. What do you want with a mess? You actually want to deal with *this* every day?” Stark darkly added, “I give it week and you’ll move on.”

Loki stated firmly, “I will not.”

“They always do eventually.”

Who hurt him? Who left him in this state?

“I will not.”

Stark looked unconvinced but he slumped beside him. Loki struggled to comprehend the turn of events of the evening. He moved both hands to one of Stark’s and picked it up, warming it against the cold.

He spoke softly but truthfully, leaning in close to catch and keep Stark’s gaze. “You are no more broken than myself. We are both a mess. Remember? We are both shattered but the world fades away when you are near. You intrigue me. You entrance me. I wish to know you. You are not a burden. No more than I am a burden to you.”

Stark stared with gloriously wide eyes. He appeared caught between warring emotions. Loki could only guess it was between his own self-doubt and hopefully his own interest in Loki. There was a long heartbeat of silence, then Stark kissed him. It was a desperate, aching kiss. All the hurt and worry and confusion within Stark was poured into it. Loki did his best to return it, to meet the onslaught head on, to return acceptance and understanding. An understanding through his own hurt. He released Stark’s hand and instead cupped the man’s face between long fingers. The kiss was sloppier than before, less calculating to tease the other, and they lost themselves in merely *feeling*.

They broke many minutes later with a gasp from Stark. The man leaned his forehead forward and rested it against Loki's. His eyes opened and they were the most beautiful deep brown in the low light.

“I hope you mean it all,” he whispered.

“Every word.”

He went quiet again and Loki brushed his thumb against the man's cheek.

“Let us return,” Loki finally said. Stark made to protest but Loki quieted him. “It does you no good sitting here in the snow.”

His usual harassment shone through as he wondered, “Asgardians don't mind the cold?”

“You forget I'm adopted.”

“Oh yeah. What are you really, then?”

Loki raised an eyebrow at the man's blunt questions but answered honestly. “I am a Frost Giant.”

Stark cocked a little grin at him. “You're not *that* tall.”

“I'm the runt of the family,” he half joked, moving to stand up and pull Stark with him, preparing to teleport them back.

“Wait,” Stark said, reaching to take his hand in his instead. “Let's get a room.”

“A room?”

Stark nodded and pulled out the device from his back pocket, calling up info on nearby hotels. “I want to sleep in a real bed tonight, and I don't want to wake up to your brother again.” Then he cast an almost shy look up at Loki. “If that sounds good to you.”

Loki smiled. “That sounds marvelous.”

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

This chapter is the first to earn the Explicit rating.

The hotel was sleek and modern but Loki expected Stark to pick nothing less. A large bed sat made with white linens and black accent pillows. The wall behind the bed was a matching black row of panels, the fixtures a contrasting silver.

Stark pulled off his parka and hung it behind the locked door to their room, then toed off his sneakers as he stated, “I’m taking a long, hot shower.” He cocked a grin up at Loki. “You’re welcome to join me...”

Loki blinked. The man could not be serious with such an offer. “I shall politely decline.”

“Spoilsport.”

“Hot water is not my favorite.” It was the truth, but he also was not looking to push Stark too quickly again by taking him up on the offer.

“Oh yeah. Frost is in the name. Gotcha.” Stark tugged his shirt up over his head as he walked for the bathroom. The sight of bare, broad shoulders was horribly distracting. Loki’s gaze followed after him. He almost didn’t hear Stark’s next words. “So, is that not really what you look like?”

“I...” He cleared his throat once Stark disappeared from sight, the faint sound of the shower starting. “Odin enchanted me as a child to appear Asgardian.”

Stark’s head popped out of the bathroom’s doorway. “Then what *do* you look like?”

Always with the blunt questions. “Blue. Horned. Red eyes. I prefer this form.”

Stark raised both eyebrows at the description. “That’s gotta be somethin’ else.” He ducked back into the bathroom and his voice grew quieter as he obviously made his way back to the glass shower stall. “You sure you prefer the Asgardian look? You’d make a fucking impact walking around as a blueberry.”

Loki huffed a chuckle at the comment and walked to the wall beside the entrance to the bathroom, leaning beside the open doorway. He called within, “Do you not care for my current appearance?”

“I said no such fucking thing,” Stark said. Loki could hear the sound of the door to the shower sliding open and closed as Stark stepped inside. “I’m just curious. Never dated an alien before, that I know of, much less a smurf in disguise.”

Loki himself had never been with anyone who knew of his heritage, much less showed so much interest in it. He wasn’t certain how to react to such interest. So instead he shifted the conversation, teasing, “Two kisses and we’re *dating*?”

“You’re the one who doesn’t want to join me in the shower to consummate.”

Loki chuckled. A corner of him berated the choice but he'd rather Stark shower alone than fall into another panic attack.

Stark was quiet a beat, then wondered from the shower, concern in his voice, "Should I not say the D word?"

"I did not mean it like that," Loki hastened. "This is most assuredly a date."

"It better be one of many. I want to be wined and dined, princess."

Loki laughed again. "Says the man who can buy whatever he wishes."

"Doesn't mean I don't appreciate being looked after. A guy likes to know he's special."

A smile covered Loki's features. "Noted, my dear."

Stark hummed happily, the sound echoing in the tiled bathroom. There was silence but it wasn't awkward, and Loki's mind wandered imagining Stark's naked form under the cascade of water. Eventually the other man's voice broke the silence, "If I turn down the temp, will you stop playing hard to get?"

Loki swallowed at the warm tone to Stark's words. "I don't wish to push—"

"It's not a push if I ask for it."

Warring emotions washed over him. He shouldn't allow the man to goad him into more but then it was Stark, naked in a shower, asking for company. If things went poorly, could it still be his fault?

The creak of nobs being turned sounded over the fall of the water. Stark hissed at the temperature change. "Now I'm fucking freezing. Get in here and warm me up."

Fuck it. Such brazenness ought to be rewarded. Loki removed his clothes with a wave of his hand, stepping into the bathroom. It was humid but the air was growing colder. The idiot had indeed turned the temperature down, severely. He could see his naked form through the fogged glass but it was nothing compared to the smug sight of the man once he opened the glass door. Stark grinned like a tiger who had won his dinner, reaching immediately to pull Loki in.

The door clattered shut behind him. The water was decidedly cold, colder than Stark had to make it, but the man was never one to do anything by half measures. Loki got the barest glimpse of Stark underneath the water, hair a gorgeous mess and cheeks flushed, before the man kissed him, pulling him down by hands in Loki's increasingly wet hair.

The kiss was deep and adoring, with a hint of desperation. Loki did his best to soothe and reassure. The interest was mutual. The need was mutual. He would not desert Stark.

He guided Stark back a few steps to press him against the glass. They ended up beside the controls to the shower. Loki reached to turn the temperature up to something more mild. Not boiling hot but not freezing. Stark hummed into the kiss. Loki moved both hands to cup Stark's face, losing himself.

The man's hands in his hair twisted. He arched his back off the glass to press his chest and midsection to Loki. The warm solid tease was intoxicating. Loki shifted closer still, pining the man firmly between himself and the glass, and tilted his head to tease his tongue against the roof of Stark's mouth.

Chests, stomachs, hips pressed together. Stark's cock was warm against his skin, firming at a delicious rate. It was all the encouragement Loki needed. He rocked his hips, rubbing his own trapped cock against Stark's stomach, and earned a gorgeous moan.

All thought fled and it was just touch and tease and feel. He rutted against Stark while they both firmed completely, then dropped a hand down to snake between them. He wrapped fingers around Stark's cock and stroked, one long, firm pull upwards. The man was so vocal, even through the hungry kiss. Loki rubbed his palm against his aching head and Stark shivered against him, still pinned to the glass.

A few more strokes and Loki ended the kiss, earning a whine from Stark. Loki arched his upper half away from Stark and looked down to slot their cocks together, wrapping long fingers around both of them. Stark's cock was thicker than Loki's but Loki had him on length. Stark moaned and hooked a leg up over Loki's left thigh, fingers twisting Loki's wet hair up into a bun.

“So stunning, my darling,” Loki sighed against his lips, stroking the pair of them at a steady pace. He licked and nipped at Stark's lips, panted breaths mingling, before trailing little nips down Stark's jawline. He increased his pace as Stark began thrusting up against his hold on him. He lightly bit behind Stark's ear before purring, *“I have you. Let go.”*

Stark gasped and shuddered at the words. He rolled his head back against the glass, moaning to the ceiling, echoing in the confined space. Loki nipped and kissed his way down his now exposed throat, squeezing tighter around both their cocks as he felt Stark stiffen. He could feel the climax coiling within Stark. It was mesmerizing to witness the man heed his words and give in to it. For a split second he marveled at being here at all, after all that had happened, after their own mutual history, yet he had Stark right here, teetering on the edge, moans echoing in his ears.

Then the man came. Loki looked down between them, forehead pressed to the man's neck, and drank in the sight of the gorgeous cock pressed to his own pulsing and spilling seed between them. Most was swiftly washed away with water but it was still a sight to behold. It kicked off Loki's own climax, sending a strained whimper from his lips, as he thrust against his strokes and Stark's spent cock. Stark shuddered at the continued strokes, twisting fingers roughly in his hair. Loki came with a sharp cry, his own seed washing away too quickly between them.

He shuddered to a stop and slowed his strokes of them. Stark seemed to melt further against the glass. Eventually he released them and kissed his way up Stark's neck to kiss his lips, pinning himself against the man once more. Stark rocked his hips, rubbing their cocks together one last time.

It was a long while before the kiss ended. When it did, Stark brushed his nose to his and murmured, “Best cold shower I've ever had.”

Loki huffed a laugh and opened his eyes, meeting Stark's dark eyes, rimmed with long wet lashes. He was like nothing else. Loki struggled to find any words but finally managed, “Only the first of many more to come.”

“Hmm...” Stark twisted fingers in Loki's long hair and then released it, instead brushing back strands behind his ears. “I could get used to them.”

Stark kissed him and they enjoyed the warm afterglow until they had enough of standing in the shower together. They rinsed off and then dried with overly fluffy towels before Stark pulled him to the bed. They climbed in naked and huddled under blankets. Stark curled himself against Loki same as he did when they slept in the cargo ship, pressed to his side and arms wrapped around his midsection. Loki brushed fingers through still damp hair as Stark pressed his face to Loki's neck.

Stark muttered sleepily against his skin, “I’m not too hot, am I?”

The concern warmed Loki’s heart. He slid his hand out of Stark’s hair and down the man’s back. “Never.”

“Good.” He nipped playfully at Loki’s neck. “I wouldn’t want to overheat my giant.”

Loki chuckled and played fingertips back up Stark’s side.

For whatever reason, Stark seemed able to fall asleep immediately when curled against him. It was the same here as back at New Asgard. Loki couldn’t help but feel proud of pulling the feat out of Stark. Somehow he doubted Stark slept easily otherwise.

Loki sighed and closed his own eyes, pressing his face to Stark’s hair.

Chapter 12

They woke to a loud beeping. The sound echoed through the room. Stark grunted and tightened his arms around Loki as the two reluctantly woke. The sound seemed to be coming from the bathroom. Loki squinted his eyes open, dumbfounded, until Stark muttered against his neck, “It’s my stupid fucking phone.”

Ah yes. The device in his pocket, long ago discarded on the tiled floor in his jeans. It continued to ring and ring and ring. Loki scrubbed a hand down his face as he struggled to come fully awake. He’d been so deeply asleep. His exhausted body still clung to the idea of ignoring the sound and falling back asleep but it kept going.

“I’m going to kill Happy.”

Loki sighed and squinted to focus, twisting a hand to summon the phone to his fingers. The beeping was ever louder now that it was right there. Loki frowned and Stark grunted. Stark reached blindly for the phone and punched a button with his thumb. The beeping stopped and the screen flickered to life. Stark’s face was still buried against Loki’s neck as he said, “I swear if this isn’t-”

Peter’s whispered but frantic voice cut through, “Mister Stark, I couldn’t get Happy, and I know Karen’s only supposed to use this number for emergencies, and I’m sorry, but I need backup. Now.”

Fear jolted through both of them. Stark sat up immediately in bed. “Where are you?”

“I’m in a warehouse in Queens. It was supposed to be no big deal but now I’m trapped in a corner and-”

“Stay calm, short stuff. Lay low and send me your coordinates.”

Stark’s device’s screen flickered with data. “Done.”

“Keep quiet. We’ll be there in two minutes. Stay hidden.”

“It’s not just guys with guns this time, there’s this guy, I don’t know how to put it, he just gives me the creeps.”

“*Stay hidden.* No panicking. On our way, underoos.”

The call ended and Stark was up out of bed in a flash, so quick that Loki did not have time to properly enjoy the sight of that bare backside disappearing into the bathroom. Were they ever going to manage a quiet, restful morning?

Loki glanced at the clock on the bedside table. It was just after sunrise, which meant it was the middle of the night in New York. What was the child doing at such an hour?

Loki sat up and stood, waving a hand to redress himself, this time in his leather battle gear. He tugged at the cuffs to his fingerless gloves and called to Stark, “Shall I fetch your suit?”

“No need, new one is en route to the building right now.” He reappeared from the bathroom tugging on his shirt, jeans and socks back on. He leaned up to peck Loki’s lips as he passed by in a rush. “Thanks though babe.”

Loki did his best not to enjoy the term of endearment too much. Stark found his shoes by the door and ran fingers through his disheveled hair. He was stunning even just out of bed...

“I’d take a coffee if you can conjure that up.”

“My apologies, dear, but no. I shall work on perfecting such a spell.”

Stark chuckled through a yawn. He came back to Loki and pulled up the coordinates on his phone. “You manage that and you’ll never be rid of me.”

“All the more reason.”

“Smooth.”

Loki studied the readout a moment, then nodded to himself. He wrapped an arm around Stark and a moment later they blinked away and reappeared on top of a warehouse. It was dark, well into the night, city lights shimmering beyond, and honestly the child should not have been attempting anything at such an hour.

The sound of repulsors hissed as Stark’s suit landed beside them. How many suits did he have? Stark stepped inside and cast a look over the metal rooftop. There was the faint sound of voices shouting within but nothing more. Loki leaped off the rooftop onto the ground, cloak fluttering behind him, and Stark followed after.

“I shall find him. Stay in cover.” Loki shimmered a moment, then disappeared from view, stealthed behind his magic. He heard Stark begin to protest but Loki made for the doorway.

He stepped inside the warehouse, boxes and crates everywhere, and at least a dozen men wandered the place clearly searching for Peter. These men looked much more capable than the last, and there were two men in deep discussion in a far alcove. Something about the taller man was different but Loki was focused on locating Peter.

Loki passed by two guards unseen and took out a third behind a crate, one magical punch to the back of the head knocking him out. He fell down out of sight and Loki resumed his quest. Stark watched from the door as the guards were picked off, each knocked out in ones and twos without raising the alarm. Loki would appear behind them, incapacitate, and then disappear again in a flourish. He was perhaps showing off a bit but the men were still far too easy foes.

Stark slipped inside once the nearest guards were dealt with and began searching for Peter with his tech. He spotted a heat signal curled in a corner and headed toward it, ducking behind boxes as he went. Loki followed and took out another series of guards to keep them from spotting Stark. They came around a high pile of boxes and found a crate jammed up against a corner.

Stark gave a light tap to the box and whispered through the helm of his suit, “You in there, underoos?”

The heat signature disappeared.

Loki suddenly became aware of magic floating through the air of the place.

Something was wrong.

“Impressive, but predictable.” The booming voice was both smug and bored with the proceedings. The boxes around Stark and Loki disappeared and the taller of the two previously distracted men strode toward them. He wore nothing but simple tan linens tied at the waist with a cloth belt. His

gaze was locked on Loki. “Your sorcery will be stopped.”

Loki pulled out his knives in response but Stark was the first to speak, taking a protective step in front of Loki. “Who the hell are you? Where’s Spidey?”

“I am Mordo. The child was merely a means to an end. He is safe.”

“The hell he is.”

“I will not harm him. He is not a bane to the universe’s continued existence. Unlike *you*.” He narrowed his gaze on Loki. “Did you think the flaunting of such powerful magic would go unnoticed?”

“Flaunting? Who are you to care?”

Stark defended, “The Sorcerer Supreme already okayed his time here.”

The man scoffed. “*Doctor* Stephen Strange is a blight on the world. His time will come as well.” He continued his steady pace toward Loki. He traced patterns in front of himself and the fiery glow of the magic was immediately recognizable as the same as Strange’s. “You will feel nothing and the world will be better without you twisting it to your whims.”

“You think mere human mage trickery will divest me of my talents?” Loki derided, though a hint of fear twisted in his stomach. There was something decidedly disturbing about the man before them. He boasted with bravado he did not quite feel, “I am a *God*.”

“All Gods fall.”

“Fuck you.” Stark raised palms and fired repulsors at the man but the impact deflected around the glowing mandala formed in front of him. Loki hastily cast wards upon himself as he left a clone behind and shimmered himself invisible. Stark rushed ahead and leaped to slam down on Mordo.

The man created a shield on his forearm and easily blocked the blow, pulling out a short half-staff tucked in the back of his shirt. “I have no wish to fight you, Stark. My work will be but a moment with *him*.”

“Go fuck yourself,” Stark snarled, punching again, blocked once more, but this time fighting against the magical shield. Sparks flew. “You got a beef with human mages, fine, but he’s not human.”

“Indeed. He is not Asgardian either, yet he twists the world around himself, cloaking his true form.” He knocked Stark back a few steps with a powerful upward slam of his staff, the half-staff itself breaking into magicked pieces to create a whip. “Do you even truly know that which you defend?”

“I know enough.”

Loki’s heart warmed at his defense. The magician knocked back Stark again and continued toward Loki’s distraught looking clone. Loki himself crept away from the fight and back to where he’d seen Mordo speaking with someone. Peter had to be here somewhere. If he could find him, they could safely flee.

Stark roughly tackled Mordo before he could get to Loki’s clone, slamming him toward a wall, but the man tucked his legs underneath himself and walked up the wall rather than hit it, magic imbued boots allowing him to climb up above Stark to strike from above. Stark knocked him back,

keeping him busy and away from the clone.

Loki reached out as quietly as he was able with his magic, searching for Peter. He found the other man who'd been talking with Mordo in a side room, and immediately recognized the energy of the slumped form beside him in a chair. They'd magically knocked out Peter, perhaps after his call for help. Was this all to lure Loki? Was he such a threat?

He slipped into the room. The man didn't seem magically inclined and Loki risked a knockout punch from behind, reappearing from stealth. The man went down. Loki turned immediately to Peter, running a hand over his mask and down to his chest. Energy seemed to be drained from him. What twisted magic was this man using? He portioned some of his own energy off and gave enough to Peter to wake him.

The child gasped and jerked upright in his chair.

“Shh,” Loki soothed. “You are weak but whole.”

“I couldn't move,” Peter gasped in a panic through his mask. “Everything in me screamed to move but I couldn't.”

“I will teach you how to defend against magicians later but for now we *must* get to Stark. Can you stand?”

Loki offered a hand as Peter moved to stand. He was unsteady and weak. He needed a good meal and a whole day in bed.

A screamed shout from Stark in the other room echoed in the warehouse. “He's figured out the clone!”

The side room's walls creaked and then somehow magically folded up into the ceiling in clattering sections. The room tilted ever so slightly. Mordo marched his way straight for Loki.

Stark flew up with a leap and landed between them, firing repulsors again. The blasts curved around the magician. “Motherfucker,” Stark snarled and physically punched at the man once more, slowing his advance.

Loki pulled out his knives to help fend off the attack but Peter shouted, “No! Don't get close. He needs to be close.”

Loki raised an eyebrow at Peter but put his knives away. Instead, he put his hands together and reached out for his power. If he could get them away, they could fight him on their own terms, with help.

The warehouse itself groaned and the walls grew higher, the patterns on the cement floor twisting. No matter where Loki reached out to take them, it shifted magically further and further away. Eventually it was too much magic to even teleport them outside the warehouse much less anywhere further. How did this mere mortal manage such a feat? Loki gaped in surprise.

Stark still punched and dug his heels into the floor to keep the magician from making any progress toward Loki. They squared off again and again but slowly the man made progress.

“I cannot get us out of here,” Loki called to Stark. “He's enchanted the whole building.”

“Fuck. Fucking fuck.” Stark punched again but was rebuffed once more.

Peter shot webbing at Mordo, slowing him but a moment, before he easily cut it away with his half-staff whip. Peter was still unsteady on his feet as he said, “Can we just walk out of here? Run for it?”

Loki grabbed Peter by the arm to attempt it but the floor beneath their feet turned into a treadmill. They made no progress whatsoever as they tried to move.

“Dude, this is bad,” Peter said.

“I need ideas, not commentary,” Stark snapped, doing his best to slow Mordo’s pace forward but forever losing ground.

Ever creeping fear latched onto Loki. They were trapped. He was stuck here. They couldn’t leave. They couldn’t get away. How had a mortal tapped into such power? What was he to do?

Loki imbued daggers with his power and tossed them not at Mordo but at his feet, stabbing into the concrete and creating a green barrier that curved around and encased the man. The magician at least paused in his steps forward, inspecting the wall. He seemed more fascinated than trapped by the barrier.

Stark stepped back a pace but struck a defensive pose between Mordo and Loki. “Any other ideas?”

“I’m working on it,” Loki muttered, twisting magic with his fingers. If he could just get a sliver of reality, unenchant the warehouse, perhaps he could teleport them away. He pulled his hands apart and a green sliver appeared in the ceiling above them. It wasn’t enough but it was something. He could do this. He could.

Mordo tapped, testing the barrier around himself, before starting to rip it open with bare hands.

Loki pulled a larger rip in the roof, nearly arm’s length, but it wasn’t enough. He couldn’t hold it. The slit in the roof shrunk to a sliver and disappeared. He couldn’t keep it open let alone get them out. Panic rushed through him. The mage marched the last few steps forward. Peter webbed him up and stepped in front of him with Stark. With one mighty slam of his half-staff, both Stark and Peter went flying to the side.

Loki stepped backwards, trying to run, but it did no good. Stark leaped at Mordo but it was too late. Mordo punched Loki in the gut and pulled a green, glowing ball of energy from Loki. As the ball grew, the color from Loki’s features faded and oh so slowly shifted blue, until his glamour long ago placed upon him by Odin was completely shattered.

Energy drained from him. Power slipped away. He struggled to cling to what he could but it all faded into nothing. Loki slumped to his knees. Mordo marveled at the power he’d removed, clearly surprised at the sight, but then Stark clocked him in the jaw with a punch, knocking him back.

“What the fuck did you just do to him?!”

Mordo closed his hand around the power and it disappeared. He rubbed at his jaw. “He will be as the universe wanted him to be, not what he perversely twisted to his whims.”

He couldn’t feel it. He couldn’t feel the energy of the world around him any longer. Everything was gone. All of it. How had this little human ripped so much from him? He shook as he collapsed further, down onto the cement, utterly drained.

Stark grabbed the sorcerer by the front of his shirt and jerked him up off his feet. “Give it back to

him. Now!"

Mordo gloated, "You will thank me later."

Stark snarled and punched the bastard in the gut but the world shifted as Mordo blinked out of Stark's grasp. He appeared a few meters away and conjured a portal. Stark leaped after him but the mage disappeared into it before he landed.

The warehouse was suddenly achingly quiet, the enchantment gone.

Loki stared down at his Jotun hands. Panic and pain and disbelief washed over him. How had this happened? How had a mere human done such a thing to him? And what had he done? Was he cursed to be this way forever? Powerless and a monster? He began to shake on the concrete, slowly curling into a ball.

"Lokes," Stark said, helm retracting as he slid to his knees beside him. "Loki, are you alright? Breathe, baby."

He'd lost everything.

"Did he curse him?" Peter wondered.

"No," Stark muttered as he sat, pulling Loki onto his armored lap. "This is how he really looks."

Peter gaped.

Loki curled away from the look, burying his face against Stark's armored chest.

He was indeed a monster. A monster without an ounce of his power.

He shook.

"It's okay. It's okay, baby. Calm down. We'll fix this. We *will* fix this."

Loki's breathing went more and more ragged as he gasped, "There is no way to fix this."

Strange's voice echoed in the warehouse. "Not precisely."

Chapter 13

Stark and Peter's head jerked to the side to see Strange emerging from a portal of his own. Loki peeked from beneath his long hair. Ridiculous, desperate, savage hope bubbled up in Loki. Could this buffoon of a sorcerer actually be helpful? Could he?

“Where the *fuck* have you been?!” Stark shouted in heated anger. He gently slid Loki from his lap and stood. “You play motherfucking gatekeeper to the planet but don’t notice a vigilante sorcerer?”

Peter shifted his feet at Stark's anger despite himself but pointed at Strange. “Who is this guy? A good guy?”

“Remains to be seen,” Stark said darkly.

Strange turned to Peter. “Doctor Stephen Strange, Sorcerer Supreme, a pleasure Mister Parker, you’ve been doing good work in my city.”

Peter jerked to standing up straight in surprise. “How do you know my name?”

“I know everything.”

“Fuck you,” Stark snapped, marching up to the cloaked mage. “Answer my questions or I swear-”

“You were bested by Mordo yet you threaten me?”

Stark's features darkened and he swung a punch. The room shifted with a shudder and Strange was suddenly a meter to the left. Stark's blow hit nothing but air.

“Do calm down, Mister Stark. I was unable to assist-”

“Bullshit!”

Strange pushed on, raising his voice, “The *only* reason Loki was unable to evade the attack was because Mordo trapped you within this building. In turn you were locked away from me before I could intercede. I am only here now because he has gone and the warehouse returned to its previous state.”

Stark opened his mouth to continue arguing but Loki said weakly from the floor, “He speaks the truth. I could not break the enchantment on the walls. It would’ve kept him out as well.”

Stark was still in the mood to vent his anger at Strange. “But I thought you were the damn Taco Supreme or whatever. Shouldn’t you be able to defeat Mordo. How is he wandering around being a fucking psycho on your watch.”

“He is my greatest failure.”

“That’s putting it goddamn lightly.”

“He has attacked a handful of low level magic users but he is gaining strength. I have been tracking him, formulating a plan, but I did not expect what happened tonight. He was a friend-”

Stark grunted at Strange. “There’s the rub.”

“Guys...” Peter warned, trying to get them back on track, but both men ignored him.

“I assure you I will stop him,” Strange said.

“You’re the fucking protector of the planet from all magical attacks but let this guy wander around wherever the hell he wants. Free and unhindered. No consequences for attacking whoever he wants. Sounds like special treatment to me.”

“And where is Steve Rogers, Mister Stark?” Strange countered.

“Fuck you, it’s not the same and you know it.”

“Tony,” Loki interrupted in a drained voice. “Can we not focus on the here and now?” He was touched at Stark’s need to lash out and protect but it wasn’t helping at the moment.

Stark still shot Strange a glare but nodded. He walked back over to Loki.

“Quite right.” Strange cleared his throat and approached the pair. He squatted down in front of Loki as Stark knelt beside him. Loki struggled to keep Strange’s gaze. Strange’s voice was warmer as he stated, “This cannot be fixed *immediately* but I do believe it is not permanent.”

The words bolstered the hope fluttering in his stomach but they still rested heavily on Loki’s shoulders. “You have righted his other attacks?”

“No.” Loki’s face fell and Strange pushed on, “But you are not human and you gain your powers differently than myself. I believe it can be reversed. It will require rest, the rebuilding of energy, the relearning of skills, and the drive to do all those things until fully restored.”

Loki’s mind boggled at the idea. “But it’s taken me a millennium...”

Stark raised an eyebrow at the number.

“I know,” Strange said. “It may require such time, it may not. You are not human and therefore his technique was incorrect. You need time and you need to be close to a source.”

“Source?” Stark wondered.

“Norway. Odin’s death released a large amount of energy to the place. It will help. I think.”

“You think?” Stark snapped.

“But you cannot... merely return me to my previous state?” Loki asked in desperation.

“Mordo ripped out and released your power to the ether. It is gone. I cannot return it to you.”

Loki stared in disbelief. He was stuck like this. He was to learn it all again? He was to hope Odin’s spirit would help? What utter nonsense... what an... unhelpful... unpowerful... useless human. Despair washed over Loki.

“Do not give up hope, Loki. I will do my research. There may yet be something else to kick start your return to form.”

“And my enchantment?”

“I do not have the power to do what Odin managed. Not from a distance. I am afraid you are stuck as you are for now.”

Stuck indeed. Loki glared at him with blood red eyes. “You are useless.”

Strange sighed and moved to stand. "Yes... well. I can manage one thing." He pulled a strand of fiery energy between his fingers and twirled it into a circle, tossing it aside to open into a portal. "I can get you back to Norway. Perhaps the energy there will help more than you realize."

"It would be the first good thing my father has done for me," Loki muttered. He felt defeated. Everything he'd worked through his entire life, everything his mother taught him, everything he was, gone in an instant, perhaps never to return, perhaps a thousand years of practice to regain. He turned to Stark. At the very least, the man had not yet run away at the sight of him. "I don't know if I can stand..."

Stark's features were warm and somehow understanding. Loki had to look away. Stark tucked an armored arm around behind his back and underneath his legs, picking him up.

"Can I come?" Peter suddenly asked. "I want... I want to help. It was my fault you two showed up here and..."

Loki's heart ached for the child. He looked to him as Stark stood. "It is not your fault."

"It kinda is... Please? It's a Friday night. No school."

"It's not exciting, kiddo," Stark said. "Tents and construction and-"

"I can help. Please, Mister Stark."

Stark sighed. "Next weekend maybe, okay?"

Peter's shoulders slumped but he seemed to understand. "Okay." He paused a moment, wanting to say more, but then backed away.

Stark shifted his hold on Loki and pressed a kiss to his forehead between his small blue horns. He whispered, "It's gonna be okay, babe."

It was not but he closed his eyes and slumped further against Stark's armored chest.

Chapter 14

They stepped through Strange's portal and Valkyrie was the first to spot them emerge beside the cargo ship. She raised an eyebrow, flask of something already in her hand, though it was mid-morning. "What happened to you two?"

Of course she would be the first to see him in this state. Loki covered his head with an arm, face turned into Stark's armor.

Valkyrie swaggered her way up to them. "You know Thor's been ripping the camp apart looking for you guys since he woke up." She eyed Loki against Stark's chest, then cast a grin up at Stark. "He was worried Loki had you chained up somewhere, kinky shit and who knows what else happening." She took a swig from her flask and chuckled, "Who knew he was worrying about the wrong one of you."

"I didn't do this to him," Stark said. "A sorcerer—"

She raised a hand to silence him. "Save it for Thor. I don't care." She glanced to Loki. "Though you're looking good, icicle."

"Kindly go leap off the cliff," Loki snarled into Stark's armor.

"Can you first get Thor?" Stark amended.

Loki grumbled.

Stark stepped around her and she grinned after them before marching off to find Thor. Stark made his way for Loki and Thor's tent. The Asgardians were all up. One building was being furnished and the other finished. A new handful more were beginning. Everyone nearby glanced their way, then lingered at the sight. Loki could feel their gaze on him. Stark quickened his step.

They ducked into the tent and Stark set him gently on the cot. "I'll get us a real bedroom, just try to relax here for a sec."

Loki curled away from the entrance and pulled a sheet up, covering himself from head to toe.

Stark repeated, "It's gonna be okay, babe."

It was not.

Stark lingered a moment longer, pressing an armored hand to his side over the sheet, before he stepped outside.

Utter despair washed over him. Everything was gone. Everything. He couldn't feel it. He couldn't tap into that energy. There was nothing. He was empty. He was void of it all. And he felt no different here than he did in New York. Nothing was going to help. *Nothing*.

Fuck Odin.

Aching hopelessness enveloped him. Tears stung at his eyes. They felt unnaturally cold as they rolled down his Jotun cheeks. Long buried memories flooded forward at the sensation. Stripped down to his Jotun form. Tortured by heat. Beaten by minions. He was defenseless in Thanos' hands and yet here he was all the more vulnerable now. He had nothing. Nothing of his mother's

teachings. Nothing of his prowess. He was an empty, pathetic shell.

He had no concept of time but eventually his tears dried up and dreams overtook him, too exhausted to fight sleep. He woke some time later to the low sound of his brother and Stark talking in hushed tones just inside the tent.

“I loathe to move him at all,” Thor said.

“He needs a real bed, food, and time away from everyone.”

“None will shun him.”

“He knows that but he's not ready for the attention.”

Thor grunted in response. They were both quiet a moment, then Thor sighed, “I am grateful you are here for him, Tony.”

Concern clouded Stark's voice, “I just hope I can help.”

“You already do.”

Things went quiet again before a warm hand touched Loki's shoulder through the sheet. “Lokes, you awake?”

Loki pulled the cloth down enough to turn and meet Stark's gaze. Warmth and something more filled his deep brown eyes. Stark's hand moved to cup his cheek. The heat of it was delightfully overwhelming.

“Can you get up? I've got us a private room.” He winked down at him.

How could this man make his heart skip even now?

Loki nodded and moved to get up, kicking aside the sheet.

Thor was quickly to his other side, offering another hand up onto his feet. “How are you feeling, brother?”

Loki answered numbly, “Empty.”

Thor's features were worried but understanding. Before Loki could protest, he pulled Loki into a hug. He squeezed firmly but Loki did not return it. Thankfully there were no platitudes about everything working out. Instead, Thor allowed Stark to take Loki's arm and stepped ahead to open the tent's flap.

Loki was surprised to see it was quite late into the afternoon. The sun was inching toward the horizon over the cliffs. He'd slept so long? Asgardians still working nearby looked his way in the warm light. Loki's blue skin was a brilliant hue but he leaned his head forward, attempting to cover it with his hair. None stared long and most went immediately back to their work, as if he always appeared as he did now. It was... surprising but his heart still hammered.

Stark led him by the arm toward his own construction project. The bots were working on the third floor but the first and second were enclosed. They stepped through the sleek automatic main doors and it appeared the first floor was nearly complete. An unattended welcome desk sat before a long hallway. They walked down it to the very end and Stark pulled open an oversized set of doors.

The room was fully furnished. A bar and a small kitchen sat to the left, sleek white and silver

furnishings, and a gray sofa sat to the right facing the floor to ceiling windows that ran the whole length of the right wall. Their view was that of the empty grasslands rolling out away from the settlement. Further beyond in the open concept space was a large, messy bed with black bedding and gray pillows. It was very Stark with a modern Scandinavian twist.

“Friday, lock the doors. Let me know if Bruce or Thor drop by, otherwise tell everyone else to fuck off.”

“You got it, boss.”

Stark led Loki forward toward the bed. “You hungry?”

Loki felt too empty to be hungry but he shrugged noncommittally.

“You nearly slept all day, you've gotta be hungry.” Stark parked Loki beside the oversized bed and pecked his cheek before walking away to the kitchen nook. “Sandwiches sound good?”

Loki slumped down onto the bed and then toed off his boots, bringing his feet up onto the wonderfully soft mattress. He marveled some at the space and finally spoke, “When did you complete this?”

“About an hour ago,” Stark shrugged. He pulled out various containers from the fridge. “It was a bitch getting that bed out here but I couldn't snuggle with you on that cot tonight. Thor might not enjoy the show.”

The smallest of smiles curled Loki's lips at the tease and he looked down at his hands. The blue of them seemed to stand out more against the black of the bedding.

“Power's online but plumbing is still kind of half-assed. Thor's got some people working on it. They finished the main hall. Houses are next. I offered Thor a room in here but he declined. All the better. Who needs to hear him snoring next door. Bruce took me up on it but he's upstairs. So long as he doesn't Hulk out, we should be fine.” Stark worked on putting together sandwiches as he talked. The nonchalant sound of his voice was reassuring. Everything was the same as before between them.

Loki cast his gaze over the open room, marveling at the man managing to put this together for him, before he looked down at himself. He was still in his battle leathers, cape and all. He pushed aside the bitter annoyance at having to remove the clothes by hand. He pulled off fingerless gauntlets and set them on the side table, then tugged his leather tunic and cape off up over his head. He set them on the floor in a heap, now wearing a simple black linen tank. His bare blue arms mocked him but he ignored them.

Stark took him in with attentive eyes as he teased, “You better hang that cape up. I'm not ironing for you.” He walked over with two plates of sandwiches. Loki moved to stand but Stark handed him a plate. “I'll do it. Rest.”

He set his own plate aside and picked up the tunic and cape, draping both gingerly over the back of a chair. He wandered off for drinks and then returned again with two beers. He took his plate and climbed onto the bed, walking around Loki to sit beside him and against the leather headboard. Though he still didn't feel hungry, Loki took a bite. He ate more because Stark made it for him than his own need to eat.

Stark took him in while working on his own sandwich, eyes adoring in the warm light of the room. “You know you really are a gorgeous shade of blue.” The spontaneous complement was heartfelt.

Loki paused mid bite to turn to Stark. He was sincere. He truly did not dislike this form? Loki returned to his sandwich as he muttered, “There is no need to patronize me.”

Stark merely smiled at the harassment. He reached a hand to run his thumb along the ridged markings on Loki's bare left arm. “Are these tattoos or natural?”

Loki's heart skipped at the warm brush of Stark's skin against his own. “Natural.”

Stark cocked a teasing eyebrow. “Are they all over *everything*?”

Loki rolled his eyes.

“I'll find out eventually.”

A deeper blue blush colored Loki's cheeks at the bold declaration. This man would still be interested in him even as he was? Empty and a monster?

“Damn that's something else,” Stark said, taking in the blush.

Loki ducked his head in an attempt to hide, hair falling forward, but then Stark brushed his hair back behind his ear.

“You are *beautiful*, babe. You were gorgeous before and you're just as gorgeous now. I can still see *you* beneath all the blue, the same cheekbones and chin, and I like it.”

Loki shook his head, setting the remains of his sandwich aside. “You do not know what I am.”

“Of course I do. You're *you* no matter the hue.”

“I am a monster.”

“Just because you're a blueberry doesn't.”

“I was told stories as a child. The treacherous Jotunheim. Giants with veins of ice. Always seeking to fight against Odin's rule. Kidnapping Asgardian children to eat. Killing humans for sport. They were vile. The worst of the nine realms. No demon or monster compared to their wits and deception. They were to be slaughtered. My brother and I played games when we were young. We killed thousands of imaginary frost giants. My father had a children's book with tales of besting them. He read them to us knowing full well what I was beneath his glamour.” Loki looked to Stark with firm self-loathing. “I am the monster parents tell their children about at night. I am the monster from the stories which my own father read to me.”

Stark stared at him, disbelief in his eyes but accepting Loki's words. Loki hugged himself and looked away. Stark's voice was a growl when it came. “Fuck that asshole.”

Loki blinked and met his gaze again.

“What sort of twisted fuck plants all this in his son's head? Did he think you'd never find out? Or was he hoping to manipulate you when you did?” Stark shook his head and set his own plate aside, shifting to face Loki and cup the man's azure cheeks. “You are still *you*, babe. It doesn't matter what you look like. It doesn't matter what your heritage is or how your people are seen. You are *Loki* whether you look like an Asgardian or not. You weren't a monster before and you certainly aren't one now.”

Loki had to lower his deep red eyes but he leaned into Stark's cupping hands. He whispered softly,

“You truly believe so?”

“I do, Lokes.” He pressed a kiss to Loki's nose. “Forget everything your father ever told you. You are handsome. You're a smart son of a bitch. You are *you* no matter what form you take. Being like this doesn't change anything.”

Loki's whole body warmed at his words. He relaxed and his shoulders slumped. He leaned forward and rested his forehead against Stark's, eyes oh so slowly raising to meet Stark's. Quietly, he prodded, “You do not find me repulsive?”

Stark's lips twisted into a smile. “Far fucking from it, babe.”

Loki shifted forward and climbed onto Stark's lap. The man grunted and turned, leaning back against the headboard, and released his hold on Loki's face, instead wrapping arms around him. Loki curled up not unlike a cat against Stark. Stark was luxuriously warm against him. Loki tucked his head down against Stark's neck and breathed in the scent of him. Stark held him until he fell asleep once more.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

This chapter is also explicit. Please check the tags as I upload chapters and add to them. Thank you!

He woke ravenous. The room was dark. The sun had long ago set. He was curled against Stark, the two now slumped down entwined together on their sides. His stomach growled loudly. He'd never before been so hungry in his life yet he loathed to pull away from Stark. It took long minutes before he could pull himself away. The man grunted and woke as he slipped from his arms. Loki reached for the rest of his discarded sandwich and devoured it in three bites as he walked to the kitchen.

Stark stretched on the bed and yawned, "Feeling better babe?"

"Starving." Loki pulled open the freezer and grabbed a quart of ice cream. He ripped open the top and searched for a spoon.

Stark leaned over the bed to turn on a lamp. Loki squinted at the sudden light. He triumphantly found a spoon and dove into the chocolate ice cream.

"Guess rocky road was the right choice," Stark teased as he sat upright against the headboard.

Loki shoved a large spoonful into his mouth. It was delicious but anything at this point would taste divine. He walked back to the bed and offered Stark a spoonful as he sat. The man politely declined with a chuckle. Stark watched with an amused grin as Loki devoured half the quart before slowing down.

Stark took him in a moment before remarking, "Maybe eating will help."

Loki muttered between bites, "I did not eat all day. I was too distraught earlier. It means nothing."

Stark merely grunted in reply.

His hunger slowly abated as the quart disappeared. He sighed at the cold sensation, pleasantly wonderfully full, and licked at the spoon, then his own lips. He sucked a thumb into his mouth before he realized Stark was watching. The man's eyes were a lovely deep brown. Loki cocked an eyebrow and sucked a bit more deliberately before sliding the finger from his lips. Stark's eyes dilated. He truly did find him appealing in this form.

He looked down at the container, hair falling forward to half cover him, and stabbed at the last of the ice cream with his spoon. He felt anything but attractive. Perhaps Stark only liked the novelty of it all. He was after all known for his exploits. In the end, it would wear thin on him. He'd grow tired of him. Everything would slip away back to nothing and he'd be alone as a monster.

He blinked back to himself as Stark soothed in a low rumble, "You're doing amazing, baby. I can't imagine how it feels but I'm not going anywhere. You got that?"

Was Stark secretly a mind reader? Perhaps he was more transparent than he imagined. Loki sighed

and set the mostly empty container of ice cream aside. Then he met Stark's empathetic gaze. "Why should you continue your interest in me? I am useless. I am monstrous. I am a mess."

Stark raised an eyebrow at him. "So? That makes two of us."

"You are not useless and you are far from monstrous."

Stark shrugged. "I can get testimonials from plenty who would say otherwise." He shifted to cup Loki's far cheek. "We're both a fucking mess. Remember?" His gaze softened and he whispered, echoing Loki's words from the day before, "I'm not interested in just *carnal delights* either, babe. I like what I see. Blue or otherwise. I'm not walking away."

"But perhaps you should," Loki whispered. "You do not need me--"

"Oh but I fucking do. I really do." Stark pressed a kiss to his other cheek.

Loki melted at the words and the touch. He turned his head and brushed his nose to Stark's. Deep red eyes met Stark's gaze. "You're certain?"

"Promise."

Stark never did anything in half measures, even whatever there was between them.

Loki kissed him. He'd never before kissed anyone in this form. Stark's mouth was warm and accepting. The heat of the other man's tongue dipping between his lips sent a shiver down Loki's spine. Stark in turn hummed in surprise, likely at the lower temperature of Loki's mouth. Stark's tongue explored and teased over his lightly fanged teeth. Warm hands twisted at Loki's thin tank. The kiss lingered on and deepened, growing sloppy and more demanding. Loki teased his own tongue into Stark's mouth and marveled at how much hotter the man was compared to himself.

Stark shivered and broke the kiss with a wet smack of lips and a happy little growl. He slid Loki's tank up over his head. Loki cooperated and kissed him again once the clothing was gone. Warm palms pressed to his chest and he shivered. Fingertips teased over his markings and made to thumb against his nipples, when they instead brushed over long hidden scars.

The kiss broke and Stark looked down at Loki's bare chest. Lashing scars crisscrossed his blue skin, most marking over his chest and along his side, though yet more were unseen on his back. Stark gaped a moment in disbelief before he gasped, "These... aren't markings."

Loki shivered as Stark traced a fingertip over a particularly ragged scar, pitted skin and raised scar tissue. "They are not..."

"But you didn't have these last night."

"I added to the glamour. I didn't wish to have them."

"But who..." Stark's features darkened. "Thanos."

Loki swallowed at the name and nodded. "His minions, to be more precise."

"No one's seen these?" Stark asked in amazement. His eyes were wide with distress. "Thor should see these, baby."

"He knows of my capture."

"Yeah but he doesn't know about *this*." Stark traced a scar along Loki's side and gently turned the

man to follow it, Loki twisting for him, and Stark gasped at the latticework of scars on his back. “Oh Lokes...”

“It was nothing. I did not hold out long. They would've done worse but I relented.”

“Who can fucking blame you?” Stark ran a reverent hand along Loki's back. He pressed a kiss to Loki's bare shoulder over a scar and the warmth of it was a surprise. Loki sucked in a breath. Stark repeated the move down along his back, kissing over shoulder blade and nuzzling at the middle of his back. Loki shivered again and gave a deep sigh. The man's touch was so tender and adoring. He let himself be washed over with caring kisses along his scars.

He kissed his way back up to Loki's shoulder and nuzzled at his neck, whispering into Loki's ear, “You're still perfect.”

Something within him shifted and ached at the words. Even as a Jotun, even covered in scars, he was still wanted.

“*Tony...*”

Stark kissed his lips again. Adoring lips and that wicked tongue teased. Hands pulled the both of them down onto their sides, then Stark nudged him onto his back, straddling his hips. Stark caressed down his chest, paused to tease over nipples with his thumbs, and then continued on down to work at Loki's belt. The kiss broke and Stark instead traced wet, sucking kisses along his markings and scars alike, down along his neck and shoulder.

Loki twisted Stark's shirt in his hands and tugged it up over Stark's head. The man raised arms just long enough to be divested of his clothing, then went back to figuring out Loki's belt. The heat of Stark's mouth against his skin was utterly distracting. He left a warm trail of saliva behind with each wet kiss. He shivered beneath Stark, panting as he twisted fingers in Stark's short hair. The man hummed happily and kissed crisscross over Loki's chest, following scars, before wrapping lips around his right nipple and sucking firmly.

“*Yes,*” Loki gasped, arching at the sensation. It was marvelously overwhelming. He whimpered as Stark kissed across his chest to repeat the same treatment to his other nipple, this time tugging with his teeth as well. “*Oh darling...*”

Stark growled happily. He finally got Loki's leather trousers undone and kissed his way down his stomach as he peeled them off along with undergarments. Loki hissed as his cock sprung free, lifting his hips to help the man remove everything entirely. Clothing hit the floor beside the bed with a thump and Stark settled between Loki's legs, resuming his kisses down his stomach. Loki flushed a deep shade of blue all down his chest and stomach, coiling around his cock. Stark drank in the sight, kissing here and there in a tease. Then he dipped his head and ran his tongue along a marking that curved the side of Loki's cock. Loki's hips and cock twitched at the hot, wet tease.

“Told you I'd find out,” Stark purred up at him, pressing a wet kiss just beneath the head of his cock.

The idiot. He would be smug simply to intimately know him. Loki whimpered at the stalling, “Do put that mouth to better use.”

“What like this?” Stark swirled his tongue over the head of Loki's cock and his hips shuddered. Stark put a hand to them to hold him still. “Easy. I still have exploring to do.” He nipped at the side of Loki's cock, then kissed his way down to his balls, sucking one into his mouth and then the other. The heat was overwhelming. Loki moaned, sliding his legs further apart, and released Stark's

hair to twist at bedding instead. The bloody tease...

Stark gently stroked his cock as he sucked his balls, sliding from one to the other. Eventually he flicked his tongue back behind and released him to lick back further. Loki's toes curled and his hips rolled forward to give the man all the access he wanted as that tongue swirled over puckered skin. Hot mouth wrapped around the hole and Loki was a moaning mess, gasping the man's name as his warm tongue pushed gently against resistance. The play of heat against his skin there was stunning. He went achingly stiff in Stark's hand, clinging to the edge at just the tease of his tongue.

Stark pulled back and stopped his strokes. Loki whined loudly in protest. "Someone's enjoying himself," Stark purred. He pulled back to kiss up the length of Loki's cock. "Some perks to being a blueberry?"

"The heat of you," Loki gasped in response, aching at the tease. "It's so good." Fingers returned to twist at Stark's hair.

"Is that so..." Stark hummed, as if he'd already assumed as much, but grinned at the confirmation. He pressed a sucking kiss to the head of his cock before parting lips and sucking. Both hands moved to Loki's hips as they jerked, Loki gasping for breath. It was so hot and so delicious. Stark languorously took in more of him. Loki stared down at the sight, his deep blue cock sliding between bruised pink lips. Stark shifted his head as he hit the back of the man's throat. Heat enveloped him as Stark took in yet more, sliding him down his throat until he buried his nose against Loki's stomach. The man was insanely talented. "Oh my darling, oh my darling..." Loki's whole body shook. He ached to thrust but willed himself to stay still.

Oh so slowly Stark released him, eventually falling out of his mouth with a wet pop and a gasp from Stark. The man teased, licking at his lips, "Been awhile since I've practiced that move."

"*You are to practice it only on me,*" Loki growled, possessive, fingertips digging against his scalp.

"Relax," Stark soothed, swirling his tongue around Loki's cock. "All I want is my giant."

Loki huffed at the nickname but then moaned as Stark took him into his mouth again. The man repeated the mind-blowing move of swallowing him all down to the hilt, then began bobbing and sucking on a more reasonable amount of his cock. One hand shifted down to roll his balls and then tease fingertips further back, circling against puckered skin. It was all too much. He managed a warning "*Tony!*" before he climaxed, pulsing into that hot, gorgeous mouth. Loki tossed his head back and groaned as the man didn't pull away, instead sucking and teasing with his tongue, swallowing his seed. Hips bucked again but Stark allowed him to thrust a little now that he wasn't so deep. It was overwhelming and different in this form. Overheated in the best of ways.

Stark slowed his bobbing and released him with a gorgeous growl. It was possessive in its own right. Loki shivered at the sound. Stark nipped at his hip. "Oh baby, you're delicious."

It was such a line but Loki flushed more despite himself.

Stark kissed his way up his stomach and chest, sending shivers through Loki with every single one. He was ridiculously overstimulated. Stark covered him and purred into his ear, deep and coy, "You up for more? Some backdoor action...?"

Loki's whole body sung out *yes* even before he could gasp, "Yes, dearest, please."

He could feel Stark grin against his skin at his eager reply but he still pushed, "Everything's... comparable? I don't wanna hurt you."

His eagerness clouded over his mind and he struggled to focus. He'd never done anything in this form, but if he thought back to textbooks, Jotun's body temps and such were different, but most everything else worked the same. Weren't there even male concubines he'd heard of? He turned his head and met Stark's questioning gaze. He answered honestly, "I do not know. I believe so but this will be a first in this form. I shall stop you if anything feels wrong."

Stark's gaze softened. "You sure?"

Loki nodded, then teased, "I am no blushing bride, darling."

Stark chuckled and pecked his lips, then shifted back onto his knees, unzipping his trousers. He gasped in mock surprise, "You mean I'm not the first man to ravish you?"

Loki couldn't help enjoying the view as Stark stripped the last of his own clothing. He licked at his lower lip and teased, "You are not even the first *human* to ravish me." Humans were easy one-night-stands in his youth.

"Right," Stark snickered. He reached for the nightstand and pulled out lubricant and a condom. "You probably slept your way through most of the Viking villages back in the day."

"Says the man with much the same reputation."

Stark cocked a grin and leaned down to steal a kiss from his lips. "At least I get one first from a god." He nipped at Loki's lower lip. "Hopefully it stays forever mine."

It was a tease, a simple gloat from the man, but it stabbed at something deeper. A promise of something more. A wish to keep Loki to himself. Pride in getting to claim him. A want to always be the only one to have him as he was right now.

Loki reached for the condom and slipped it from Stark's fingers. "*This* we will not require."

"You sure?" Stark raised a teasing eyebrow. "I'm not gonna get Space Syphilis?"

Loki burst into laughter and rolled his eyes simultaneously. "If so, do you truly think a human prophylactic would stop it?"

"So what I'm hearing is I *am* getting Space Syphilis."

Loki shoved his shoulder and tossed the condom aside.

"I mean, you *are* worth it, baby, but it's good to know ahead of time."

"Shut up and ravish me, you imbecile." Loki pulled him down by the shoulders and kissed him, deep and demanding. The other man melted down on top of him and his warmth all along his torso was heavenly. His cock was hot and heavy pinned between them. Loki teased a hand between and wrapped long fingers around him.

The man hissed as he broke the kiss, gasping against lips, "*Holy fuck.*" The temperature difference was apparently enjoyable on both ends. He groaned and thrust into Loki's hold on him a moment before pulling away and leaning back on his heels once more, forcing Loki to release him. "You wanna be ravished, baby, then we better focus or I'll make a mess of you instead."

Loki cocked a pleased grin up at him, then bit at his lower lip with his lightly fanged teeth while watching Stark with the lubricant. The man slicked down fingers and then his own impressive cock. Loki half expected to be turned around but surprisingly the man grabbed a pillow and lifted

Loki's hips. Loki's refirming cock settled solidly on his stomach as his hips were raised. He wasn't used to a partner wishing to see his face, much less as he was now.

He bent his legs some and Stark adorably kissed at the pattern on his right knee, then down along his inner thigh. His slicked hand moved to tease a finger against puckered skin. A firm push in with a middle finger and Loki moaned low. The heat teasing into him was incredible. Stark had a gentle, practiced touch. He stretched but he knew when to pause. A second finger was added but both immediately went to rubbing and stretching rather than straight into thrusting. Loki's thighs trembled as Stark found what he was searching so gently for, rubbing over his prostate. Stark lightly bit at the inside of his thigh and sent another shudder through him.

“Fuck, you’re so goddamn sexy,” Stark proclaimed with a possessive growl. *“I can see the deeper blue flush all over. You’re beautiful.”*

Loki doubted his words, he couldn't see himself as handsome as he was, but he believed that Stark told the truth and *he* believed him beautiful. Loki turned his head to the side to hide from the compliment, one small horn rubbing against the pillowcase. His whole body sung for the wonderful man between his legs.

Stark gingerly added a third finger and Loki whined loudly. *“Enough, please!”*

“Such a fucking demanding diva,” Stark growled, biting at Loki's other inner thigh.

Loki trembled at the continued teasing against his prostate. Two fingers rubbed to either side while the middle ghosted over the nub of nerves. It was infuriatingly delicious. Loki could do no more than moan and whimper, twisting at the bedding. It felt like ages before Stark slid fingers from inside of him and slicked his cock once more. He was an aching, pliant mess as Stark easily maneuvered him however he wished, settling between raised legs and guiding himself.

Heat pressed against Loki and gently pushed inwards. It was thicker and hotter than mere fingers. Stark's hands went to his raised hips and Loki's legs wrapped around the man's thighs. Moans echoed in the open room as Stark gingerly sunk into him, going inch by inch, pausing here and there, overall the most patient lover Loki had ever known. It was both endearing and fucking irritating. He tightened his legs around Stark's thighs but it didn't hurry the man. Loki moaned and tossed his head back, horns scraping against pillows.

It was bliss when the man fully seated himself inside of him and rolled his hips. He rubbed against nerves, sending Loki's arms and legs trembling. Stark hissed at the sensation in return, eyes wide drinking in the sight of the creature beneath him. He started into short little thrusts up against Loki's prostate.

“Yes! Oh darling yes! More! Harder!”

Stark growled and ran a possessive hand up Loki's chest, steady him with a hand over his heart, pinning him to the mattress. *“So. Fucking. Demanding. Princess.”* Yet he did as he was asked, thrusting with more force, pace quickening some. Skin smacked deliciously against skin and the sound of their groans filled the room. He opened eyes and leaned up while pulling Stark forward enough to meet for a wet, sloppy kiss. Stark held Loki steady by the left horn. When they parted Stark lowered himself to tease a nipple and kiss over scars.

Loki twisted fingers in his hair again. *“Harder!”*

Stark bit down just above his left nipple as he dutifully complied. The headboard began to smack against the wall in time to Stark's thrusting. Loki tugged at Stark's hair. Everything faded away. It

was simply him and Stark and this room. Nothing else mattered. Nothing at all. It was like nothing else. He'd been with plenty of males before but it was different. Beyond the heat against his colder temperatures. Beyond the newness of a partner. It was the caring. The adoring. The teasing. The wanting. He was still young by Asgardian or Jotun standards. He'd not experienced something like this before.

Stark moaned against his chest, face buried against it, as his pace faltered into rough, frantic thrusts. His breathing went ragged. They were close. They were both so close. A hand moved to Loki's cock and he stroked to get him off first. A squeeze of fingers was enough. Loki came again with a shudder and a cry of Stark's name. Stark swore up a storm as he thrust through the climax one long moment before joining him. The pulse of hot seed into Loki was icing on his shuddering cake.

Stark slowed to a stop and collapsed onto Loki. They both turned to mush. Panting was all Loki could hear. Stark remained with his face buried into Loki's chest. The feel of his warm breath against his skin was glorious. As they came down, Stark pulled his hips back, letting his softening cock slide free. Loki whined in protest.

Loki's breathing evened out but Stark's remained rapid. He was so lost in the afterglow that it took Loki a bit to notice. He blinked and looked down, brushing fingers through Stark's hair.

“Anthony?” he said, Stark's whole name slipping out in his concern.

Stark's breathing hitched and concern washed over Loki. The man muttered against Loki's chest, “I... I don't...”

Fear spiked in Loki. He moved hands to cup Stark's face and lifted it, seeing tears in Stark's eyes. Fear and doubt washed together. Had he not enjoyed the coupling? Had he done something wrong?

“Fuck,” Stark muttered and jerked out of Loki's grasp, moving to pull away.

“What have I done?” Loki gasped, reaching to stop him.

“Nothing, I just... I just...” Stark collapsed on his side, panic washing over him. “It's stupid because I'm stupid. It was great. It was wonderful. It was fuckin' incredible. I just don't...”

“My darling.” Loki rolled onto his side to soothe the man, cupping his cheeks once more.

Stark trembled beside him. “I'm too old to do this all over again. I can't...” He met Loki with imploring eyes. “I just don't think I can do this... without falling really fucking hard.”

Loki blinked at the words.

Stark pushed on through his panic. “I can't do casual any more. I can't. And I don't know if I can do serious, because I've only done serious once, and it was a fucking mess, and I don't want this to be a fucking mess. I...”

Loki kissed him. He poured into it all he had no words to say. The feelings Stark gave him. The way this was different. The way this man was unique in all creation. The need he had to be with him. The want to never leave his side. The fact he would face *anyone* with him. How the man even made him feel wanted and gorgeous as he was right now. Stark's trembling steadied some as he returned the kiss.

Only as Stark stilled did Loki end it, meeting the man's gaze once more. He whispered softly, “Perhaps it will be a mess, perhaps it will not, but I do not care. I want it. Whatever it is to be, I wish to have it. With you.”

Stark's stunning eyes widened. He leaned his forehead against Loki's and said quietly back, repeating, "I hope it's not a mess... but I do want it. Whatever it is to be."

"We are a mess, dearest," Loki reminded. "But that doesn't stop us from going forward. One stumbling step at a time."

Stark smiled gently and cupped a not completely steady hand against Loki's azure cheek. "Stumbling steps *together*."

"Together," Loki nodded and pressed a kiss to Stark's inner wrist.

Stark curled forward and pressed himself against Loki. Loki wrapped an arm around him, then pulled a blanket up over them. Stark sighed and sunk further against him.

Eventually his small voice said, "Sorry for... freaking out..."

"Never, my darling." Loki kissed his hair. "Never apologize. I know the man in my arms. I would be there for you, I would hear your worries, always."

Stark wrapped clinging arms around him in return. He was quiet a moment before asking, "It's not... annoying? Draining? I don't want to..."

"You are no burden I do not wish to carry. You are *mine* to hold and help."

Stark released a both surprised and relieved breath against Loki's shoulder. "You mean it?"

"I do. I promise."

Who had hurt him so? Loki would rend them if he were allowed. How would anyone not wish to lighten this man's load onto their own shoulders?

Stark tucked his head against Loki's neck and this time Stark was the first to sleep. Loki listened to his steady, calm breathing until he joined him.

Chapter 16

He was caged. Trapped in a cell. Chained to the painfully heated floor. It was hauntingly familiar. Screams sounded from beyond and mingled with his own. He couldn't distinguish which were his and which were not. They all blended into a cacophony of pain. Lashing, red hot pain against azure skin. He'd been cuffed from using his powers before but this time he was devoid of them. He was helpless. He was nothing.

A cry to his right caught his attention. It was thunderous and familiar. Through the bars he saw his brother, lightning flickering from chained hands, but just as powerless to escape. Another scream to his left. It was wracked with pain and exhaustion. Stark dangled from chains.

Loki jerked at his bindings but he could not remove them. He was boxed in. Trapped. Locked away. Why couldn't he magic out. Why couldn't he help. He would help them. He would free them. His wrists bled as he pulled and struggled, screaming in frustration.

The dream shifted. A beacon of light appeared, ever growing, and enveloped everything. It was blinding. The screams faded. The cells disappeared. Loki slumped to his knees. The light had a warm kiss to it, like lying under a summer sun. Calm washed over him. The nightmare faded.

“You carry such a burden.” The voice echoed in the endless light surrounding him. Loki blinked and slowly the brightness faded. Gradually he found himself kneeling on grass before the cliff where Odin had passed, but it was not Odin standing before him.

Loki's eyes widened. “Mother!”

Frigga stepped forward in a flowing white gown laced with gold, reaching to cup Loki's face as he knelt before her. “Do you think I would not follow my sons to our new home?”

Tears welled up in Loki's red eyes. “Mother, I am sorry. I am so sorry. It was my fault. Your death was all my fault and I—”

She shushed him gently, running fingers through his hair, brushing palms over his short horns. “Never. Loki you are no more responsible than Thor or Odin or any other soul. It was my time and I chose it. I chose to protect. I chose to fight.”

Tears rolled down Loki's cheeks all the same.

“My son, do not add this to your burdens. It was not your doing.” She bent to kiss his forehead. “And I am still with you. We are still with you. Odin and I will protect you both, protect you all, as much as we are able.”

Loki's voice was a longing ache. “I miss you so much, mother.”

“I know.” She cupped his cheeks again. “And someone harmed you but they know not what they truly began.” Frigga's fingers shimmered with power. They glowed and Loki's features took on the same radiance. It slid over his head and down his body until he was enveloped completely in the light. “Be whole and wreak vengeance, my son. Protect and fight for those in need.” She released him and stepped away, her figure flickering into light itself and fading. “I love you, Loki.”

Loki woke with a start. Tears pricked his eyes. The room was bright with sunlight and the bed warm because of it. He jerked in the bed and reached out for Stark. He found it empty. Eyes

flickered open but squinted at the light.

“Awake finally, Lokes?” came Stark's voice from beyond the bed. “Friday, tint the windows some more.”

The room darkened and Loki's eyes focused. He sat upright to see Stark playing with one of his homemade recreations of the cargo ship's backup cores. It seemed to be humming with life.

Loki's voice croaked as he wondered, “How long have I slept?”

“Most of the day again.” Stark set a tool aside on the coffee table with the rest of his devices. He took in Loki as he stood, eyes large, and crossed to the bed. “You're looking better, baby...”

Loki ran a hand over his face and the dream flooded back to him. He could feel no markings. He dropped his hands and looked down at pale, Asgardian arms once more. Reaching within himself, he could feel energy coiled inside. It was recovering, as if he'd battled for days, but it was there. His mother had handed it back to him.

Tears started anew. “Mother...” he gasped to himself. What had he ever done to deserve her?

Stark climbed onto the bed beside him. “Mother?”

Loki nodded, stunned to silence. It was not Odin and his *energy* which helped him. It was his own mother. Tears fell down his cheeks. Stark cupped one and Loki met his gaze. His voice was dazed, “I dreamt of her. She came to me. She...” He gasped as more tears fell free. “She did this. She made me whole again. I can feel it.”

Stark brushed his thumb over Loki's wet cheek. “She did this? Through a dream?”

“Yes. Dreams work differently for Asgardians. It's more of a gateway.” Loki's eyes met Stark's. “She didn't blame me... for...” He couldn't say it.

Stark's features softened and he cupped both of Loki's cheeks as he soothed, “Of course she didn't.”

“She said it wasn't my fault.”

“It wasn't, Lokes.”

More tears flowed and Loki shifted forward, ducking his head against Stark's neck and pressing himself against the other man. Stark wrapped arms around him. He rubbed slowly at Loki's bare back.

“It's okay. I gotcha, babe.”

Relief and grief mixed together and Loki cried against the man's cotton shirt. Stark held him, rocking slightly on the bed. It was long minutes before he calmed down. Stark's shirt was wet against his cheek when the tears dried up.

Stark's voice was a low rumble as he played fingers through the back of Loki's hair. “I wish I could've met her.”

“Me too.” The room went quiet a moment before Loki whispered in a hushed tone, “Thank you.”

“Always, baby,” Stark soothed. He turned his head and pressed a kiss to Loki's hair. “So, she put you back together?”

“Mostly. I still feel weak, as if I used my magic endlessly for days, but it's there. I can feel it again.”

Stark ran a hand down along his bare arm. “And this?”

“Her doing.” Loki shivered some at the warm but callused touch of Stark's fingers. “It feels slightly different but I can't really explain. Odin's was a mask in comparison. This feels more... me.”

“Mama would do a better job of it.” Stark kissed his forehead and then nudge Loki's head up enough to meet his gaze. “You know I still like the blue too. I like *you* no matter the form.”

Loki melted at the reassurance. He kissed the man, sweet and warm, before whispering against his lips, “I know.”

“Good.” Stark brushed his nose against his. “Though I have to say, I'm partial to these gorgeous bright eyes...”

Loki's lips curved into a smile at the compliment. He murmured back, “They cannot hold a candle to your amber.”

Stark cocked his own grin. He wiped thumbs along Loki's tear streaked cheeks and shifted the conversation. “You gotta be hungry, Lokes. I got you some clothes. Not that I don't mind you walking around in the nude.”

Loki rolled his eyes and pecked the man's lips. “Thank you, darling.” He uncoiled himself from Stark's side.

Stark stood and opened a closet on the back wall, displaying an array of black and green Midgardian clothing. Loki narrowed his gaze on one shirt in particular and reached a hand out, twisting it to call the shirt to him. It was a simple spell. He wasn't even materializing it from nothing, merely moving it. The clothing resisted and Loki jerked his hand back, pouring more energy into the spell. The hanger snapped in half but the shirt teleported to Loki's hand. Loki gasped in relief at it working in the end.

Stark blinked at the broken hanger, grabbing it from the closet. “You're rough on clothes, Lokes,” he teased, all while looking pleased Loki managed the spell. Loki pulled on the emerald green henley and Stark tossed him black sweatpants to go with them. “Friday, let 'em know he's up.”

“You got it.”

“How does reheated spaghetti sound?” Stark asked as he walked to the kitchen nook. “I ate earlier since you were in a coma chatting with mom.”

Loki chuckled despite himself. Stark always seemed to be worrying over his eating enough, not that it wasn't warranted, but it was still sweet. “Whatever is easily at hand.”

“Well you could go with another quart of ice cream if you'd rather have a brain freeze.”

“Pasta is fine.”

Stark shrugged and pulled out a container to reheat. Loki tugged on his sweats, then stood and stretched. It was going to take some work but it did not feel insurmountable, not with his mother's help.

His gaze was caught once again by Stark's devices cluttering the coffee table. He padded his way

over barefoot and took in the homemade replica of the cargo ship's backup cores. It hummed lightly and glowed. "Did you successfully recreate it?"

Stark grunted from the kitchen, turning to see Loki taking in his work. "I did. I'm still seeing how stable it is." He crossed the room to him and hastily reached to clean up some of his tech. "Sorry, I won't leave the place a mess, I just didn't want to leave you alone to work on it."

Loki blinked at the apology. "Why would I be upset at your working here?"

Stark shrugged but looked down, reorganizing the mess on the coffee table. "Because I'm... mixing our bedroom with my work and invading your space?"

"Darling, you are a craftsman. I am fully aware of your hobbies."

"Yeah but I shouldn't make a mess--"

Loki interrupted, "I like your messes."

Stark looked up and met his gaze. Slowly he relaxed even as he asked, "You're sure you don't mind?"

Who told him his work was a bother? Loki stated firmly, "Not ever. I enjoy your creations."

"I'm holding you to that when I bring my work to bed."

Loki raised an eyebrow and teased, "Am I to ride you while you wear your suit? Does the codpiece come off?"

Stark flushed pink but his eyes sparkled. "Could you wear the horns while you do?"

Loki laughed and shoved the man.

The door to their room clicked open and Thor strode in, smiling at the sound of Loki's laughter. "Brother! You are awake, and well!"

"I am," Loki turned to him with a smile. He was none too surprised when Thor crossed the distance and immediately hugged him. The man was all about hugs as of late. The back of his mind wondered if it was because Thor had mourned him again. He patted the man's back gently and thankfully was soon released. Stark ducked back to the kitchen to give the brothers some space. Loki said quietly to Thor, "Mother came to me in my dreams. *She* helped me."

"Mother?" Thor's features were a mixture of pleasure and remorse. "I thought Strange said father--"

"He was wrong." Loki shook his head. "Perhaps his energy is here but I do not feel it." He paused, then added, "Mother did say she and father were looking after us all."

Thor's features softened. "Truly? Are they proud?"

Loki squeezed his brother's arm. "I do believe so."

Thor smiled, then shook his head, refocusing on Loki. "And look at you. Is your magic back as well?"

"Mostly. It's drained but it's there. I can feel it. I need more rest but I should recover swiftly."

"Wondrous news!" Thor beamed a smile at him, then glanced to Stark. "Tony has been ever

watchful. I could not get him to leave you this morning. I had to fetch all this for him.” He nodded to the equipment.

“You did a good job of it, big guy,” Stark teased. “You only broke one thing.”

“It was broken when I picked it up!”

“Uh huh.”

Loki smiled at their banter. Thor was noticeably more relaxed about Stark being in Loki's company. If nothing else, the whole event seemed to have calmed Thor's concerns. “How goes the construction?”

Thor turned back to Loki with the look of a proud leader. “The main hall is finished, along with a public bath and one home. There's a lottery on who gets to claim them as they're done, those with children going first of course. A handful more are in various stages of work. Building should quicken now that we have blueprints of what we wish to do.”

“Fantastic,” Loki genuinely praised.

“There's still a room next door if you want it,” Stark offered. He pulled food from a dish in the microwave and onto a plate.

“No, thank you, I would not wish to intrude.”

“He's not *that* loud,” Stark harassed. He crossed the room and handed the plate of spaghetti and a fork to Loki. “Sit and eat, Lokes, before you pass out.”

Loki turned pink at the tease while Thor huffed a laugh. He hastily sat to focus on his food and ignore the pair.

“It's not *him* I worry overhearing,” Thor tossed back.

Loki groaned into his meal.

Stark groused, “Are you saying I'm loud?”

Thor teased, “I *have* spent time at the Avengers compound, and my room was not even beside yours.”

“Hey! I never had anyone over while you were there.”

“I do not begrudge anyone their personal solo stress relief.” Thor cocked a harassing grin.

Stark chuckled even as he grumbled, “Fuck you.”

“Please everyone stop talking. I am attempting to eat.” Loki stuffed a large forkful into his mouth in protest of the topic.

“Sorry, baby.” Stark reached to brush back Loki's hair, tucking it behind an ear, then looked back to Thor. “So, when the hell did you and Jane break up? Too much thunder down under to handle every night?”

Loki groaned and nearly threw the plate of pasta at Stark's head.

Chapter 17

“Hey Loki, you got a minute?”

Loki turned to see Banner approaching him. Loki raised a curious eyebrow but gave a curt nod. He turned back and finished placing the copper sheet against the column he was working on. He was unable yet to magic anything too massive so he’d resigned himself to decorative work on the finished buildings.

“Looking good,” Banner remarked as Loki came up to him.

Loki shrugged. “It’s not the gold of Asgard but it shall do.”

“I’m shocked Tony hasn’t flown in gold bars for you guys. He does love his bling.”

“Do not encourage him, he’s provided far more than enough to this whole settlement.”

“Like he wasn’t going to help a bunch of space refugees.” Banner chuckled and turned to walk them through the camp.

Loki followed after. It was beginning to truly feel like a city. New Asgard bustled with activity. Paved stones lined the finished main street. Families, workers, and craftsmen crowded their path. Nerves bubbled up in Loki as Banner remained silent, walking them through the remaining tents toward the cliff side. What did they need to be so alone to discuss? A part of him knew exactly what it might be but he steadied himself for the conversation. Banner wasn’t going to attack him. Probably.

Only as they reached the edge of the cliffs, the sounds of the newly formed city behind them, did Banner stop and turn to him. He took in Loki for a long moment. His look was something unreadable. Concern, perhaps? Contemplation. A hint of understanding. A spark of something more.

Banner leaned forward and Loki flinched, nearly leaping backwards, before realizing he was being pulled in for a hug. Bruce Banner was *hugging* him. Loki gaped over the man’s shoulder before pulling himself back together. He oh so gingerly returned the hug.

“Thank you.” The man squeezed before releasing him.

Loki was still struggling to comprehend what was happening.

Banner cocked a smile at Loki’s bewilderment. “I mean it. I haven’t seen Tony this good in *years*. I can tell he’s sleeping and eating and actually giving a shit about taking care of himself. He’s *happy* when we work. The... panic to get things done is still there, but it’s quieter, you know?”

Loki still gaped at the man’s words. He blinked and struggled to find a response. “I don’t know if it’s all my doing-”

“Oh it is,” Banner interrupted. “He’s been spellbound around you since we got back, but now that things are... where they are now between you two, well, the last few days have been incredible. It’s like having old Tony back. He’s got music blasting and he’s telling stories and shooting the shit and fucking *humming* while he works.” Banner leveled him with a look. “*You* did that.”

Loki looked down at his feet. His hair fell forward over his face and he shrugged. “I am merely

there for him.”

“It’s more than that. Pepper was there but not like this. So just, whatever you’re doing, don’t stop.”

Loki warmed at the praise but honestly he did not feel as if he required thanks for it all. He supported Stark because the man supported him in return. Still, Loki raised his gaze and wondered, “Pepper?”

Banner grimaced. “You guys haven’t talked exes yet? Sorry. Forget I said anything.”

“Pepper was his last partner?”

“Yeah. She’s a great CEO but I’m not sure if she was the best girlfriend. I don’t know if she ever really *got* Tony, if you know what I mean.”

Loki nodded. He’d had the same impression numerous times with the way Stark reacted to his support. “Were there any before her?”

“I... shouldn’t really say.”

“I know of the exploits, the universe knows of them, but I mean more than bedding someone.”

“Just her, far as I know.” Banner tossed him a knowing look. “But you really should be asking him about her, not me.”

Loki hummed thoughtfully. So she was to blame for his apologies over being a burden.

Banner took in Loki’s reflective features and asked, “What about you?” Loki blinked and focused on Banner again. The man prodded. “I doubt a Prince had any trouble getting a date but you don’t strike me as a commitment kind of guy.” There was a hint of concern in his voice at the last words.

Loki tossed a glance out over the sea beyond the cliff. “I had my own exploits.”

“Sleep your way through all nine realms?”

“More or less.” Loki shrugged and then looked back to Banner, features serious. “Tony is different.”

“Good.” Banner stepped in closer and his voice dropped into something much more threatening, his gaze locked on Loki’s. “Because this better be mutual. If I find out you’re using him, or you hurt him, I will slam you through the planet and out the other side. Over and over again. You got that?”

Fear spiked in Loki as he knew it was no idle threat but he stood his ground. “My interest is genuine.”

Banner took him in a long moment before he said, “Good.” He paused a moment before he added, “Then I hope Tony makes you feel as good as you obviously make him feel.”

Loki dropped his gaze. “I would say he does...”

“You treat him right and he’ll be yours forever, Loki. I hope you know what you’ve got with him.”

Loki merely smiled down at his feet.

Banner patted Loki’s upper arm and turned to leave. “Come on. Let’s go find Tony. Thor was in the middle of giving him the big brother talk when I went to find you.”

Loki raised both his eyebrows, following beside Banner. “He was not.”

“Afraid so. He was trying to teach Tony about your relative age, and the differences there, last I heard.”

Loki groaned.

“How old are you, anyway?” Banner tossed a look at him. “In human years?”

“I am not a reverse dog.”

“Thor seemed to think twenties but you look more thirty to me. Didn’t seem to matter. Tony was starting to freak out when I left.”

Loki quickened his pace toward the Avengers compound. “What?! I am no child. The comparison is incorrect to make in the first place.”

Banner rushed beside him on shorter legs. “But you’re young for an Asgardian or well... whatever, right?”

“I am younger than Thor,” Loki only admitted to.

“See, he’s just being a big brother, don’t worry about it. A little fear of Thor’s vengeance will do Tony some good.”

“I hardly doubt Tony requires threats.”

“You didn’t see him during his orgy days.”

Loki shot Banner a look as he pulled open the main door and walked into the Avengers building. Loki marched on ahead down the hall and swung open the door to their room.

Thor’s booming laughter filled the space along with Stark’s snickering like a child.

Loki blinked at the sight.

Thor and Stark looked to him in unison.

“Speak of the devil,” Thor teased, smiling wide at him. “How goes the decorations, brother?”

“Well.” Loki cautiously walked his way toward them, Banner following after. Stark cocked him a grin. Loki couldn’t help wondering, “My brother is not filling your head with ridiculous tales, is he?”

“A few.” Stark tossed a knowing look at Thor and then reached for Loki, cupping his cheeks to pull him down for a quick kiss. “You okay?” He looked to Banner who tried his best to seem nonchalant.

“Fantastic,” Loki reassured, lost a moment in having the man back within reach.

“Hey Thor,” Banner said. “How about we start work on installing Tony’s new reactors in town.”

Thor stared at Banner, then seemed to realize all at once why he was being asked to leave. “Oh. Oh yes. Yes, of course, let us begin.” He turned to Stark and slapped the man on the shoulder, then turned to leave with Banner.

Once the door shut behind them, Loki couldn't help wondering, "What did he say to you?"

"Baby, relax. I can handle your brother just fine."

Loki sighed and slumped down onto the sofa. Stark's creations littered the coffee table and spilled onto the floor and onto the nearby kitchen table.

Stark eyed him. "You don't look like you've been pummeled into the grass outside, so I guess things are good with Bruce?"

"Quite good."

"Really?" Stark grinned. "I told you he's a softie at heart. You can stop trying to hide every time he shows up."

Loki rolled his eyes and reached to pull Stark down beside him on the sofa.

Stark settled and kicked his feet up, resting them over Loki's lap. He took Loki in a moment, tucking a strand of hair behind Loki's ear, before he wondered, "Am I cradle robber?"

Loki hissed, "I knew it. I knew he would say something ridiculous."

"You're just barely an adult?" Stark pressed.

"Hardly."

"Baby."

"I am nearly two thousand years old. I am no child!"

"But in human years?"

"It's not equivalent! I have centuries upon centuries of life experiences and..."

Stark interrupted, "Is it true you've never been serious with anyone before?"

"There have been others," Loki evaded. Though he'd never met anyone who did to him what Stark did to his heart. He was indeed unique but Loki avoided saying so. "I have bed plenty."

"That wasn't the question." Stark cupped his cheek and turned Loki's face back toward his own. His next words were a surprise. "What are you doing with an old bastard like me?"

Loki shook his head against Stark's hand. "You are not old."

"I kinda am, babe. The gray hairs give it away."

"I adore them."

Stark's features softened even as he huffed, "You do not."

"I do!" Loki reached to rub a finger along Stark's goatee, tracing over hints of gray. "I enjoy every last inch of you, my darling."

The hint of deeper worries floated to Stark's eyes as he said, "Even if I'm rundown and broken?"

Loki's voice softened into a whisper. "We are both broken, we are both jagged and abused, but your pieces fit against mine, you soothe away the aches, and we shall be a broken mess together,

against whatever is to come. I would choose you and no other.”

Stark dipped his head to Loki’s fingers still brushing over his goatee and pressed a kiss to Loki’s palm. He repeated back Loki’s words, “I would choose you, too.”

Chapter 18

“Keep your mind clear. Focus on what you wish to happen, not what you fear will come to pass.”

Loki reached out with magic to pull at Peter's right boot. The young man shifted his stance to physically combat the tug.

“No, you will not win with mere strength against a proper sorcerer. When you sense the tug, *mentally* push it aside.”

“But I'm not a magician.”

“Sorcerers bend the world to their wishes. You must combat against their vision.”

“But how?!”

“Relax,” Loki soothed the stressed youth. “You have more power within you than you realize. Mentally deny my tug. Do not react physically.”

Peter huffed a breath but readied himself. Loki reached out once more and pulled. This time Peter did not outwardly fight back but his dismissal of the tug to his boot came solidly across to Loki.

“Good. Good, yes.” Loki reached out to the other boot and Peter rebuffed him well for a novice much less a human novice. “Fantastic.”

“Never thought I'd see the day of *you* training someone.” The rumbling voice of Heimdall was mildly amused. He stood watching with a small crowd taking in the training session. “But you do have Frigga's touch.”

Loki did his best to school his features but he warmed at the praise. “I have an apt student.”

“So did she.”

Loki ducked his head.

“You'll make him blush if you keep going, Heim.” Valkyrie leaned against Heimdall by an elbow against the taller man's bicep. “Please don't stop.”

Heimdall chuckled.

Loki ignored the pair and refocused on Peter. He stepped toward the young man. “You are doing well. Let us try a simple defensive spell.”

Peter's eyes widened. “Seriously?”

Loki nodded. “I will assist.” He brought his hands to Peter's chest and pressed over his suit. “Relax.”

Peter struggled to do as told when warmth flowed from Loki's hands and down over the suit itself. “What- What did you do?”

“I enchanted the suit with energy.” Loki released a breath at having placed so much into the child's costume when his strength was still recovering. He pulled his hands away and stepped back a few paces. “Now when I reach out to move you, redirect the energy back at me.”

“How?”

“Will it.”

Peter looked dubious.

Loki reached out to tug at his right foot once more. It took Peter a moment but he was a brilliant young mind. It was little wonder Stark found him so fascinating. Loki allowed the magic to bounce back at himself, his own right foot sliding forward on the grass.

“Dude!” Peter narrowed his gaze. “You’re not just putting on a show for me, are you?”

“Of course not. That would hardly help you when faced with another magician.”

“What about when they try and freeze me in place? I couldn’t move.”

“With the enchantment, push the energy back upon them. They will not expect it and it will freeze them for *hopefully* enough time for your escape.” Loki coiled green energy between his fingers and continued, “And the worst thing to do is remain still for a sorcerer. Always keep moving.” He threw a blast at Peter.

The young man easily leaped out of the way. “That I *can* do.” He back-flipped and shot two strands of webbing at Loki. Korg and Miek cheered from the sidelines.

Loki left a clone behind and twisted the image to make it seem as if the webbing wrapped around his feet. Peter crowed in victory but Loki appeared behind him, sweeping Peter’s legs out from under him and knocking him down. Loki leaned over the grumbling youngster. “Never believe what you see when fighting a sorcerer.”

“No fair.”

“It’s magic. It is never fair. To best a mage you must surprise them or-”

A sudden rough punch landed to his gut and Loki fell onto his knees beside Peter. Valkyrie cocked a grin down at the pair of them, then punched Loki in the shoulder to send him onto his side on the grass.

“Or just punch them really hard. They’re usually all twigs from never having to do anything for themselves.”

Peter laughed as Loki groaned, “I am no weakling.”

“*Sure* you aren’t.” She offered Peter a hand up.

“Hey! Play nice!” Stark walked up to the newly designated practice yard, wearing a pressed suit with a brightly colored shirt beneath. “You a Taco Supreme sorcerer yet, kiddo?”

Valkyrie offered a hand up to Loki as well. He eyed her a moment, then took it with muttered annoyance. She jerked him up roughly onto his feet.

Peter pulled off his mask as he nearly skipped to Stark. “Loki enchanted my suit! He claims I’ll be able to stop them from freezing me again next time. How awesome is that!”

“Only if you keep your focus,” Loki amended, brushing blades of grass off his battle leathers, but warmed at Peter’s enthusiasm. He was a fantastic pupil.

“You'll be the next Merlin in no time, underoos.” Stark patted Peter on the shoulder and then stepped around him to Loki. He grabbed him by the collar and pulled Loki down enough to kiss him. Sweet but promising more. Loki was dazed a moment at the surprise of it and Stark winked up at him as the kiss ended. “You're not wearing yourself out too much, are you, babe?”

“No. No I...” He lost himself in the sight of Stark. How could the man distract him so effortlessly?

Korg squeaked at the sight and Valkyrie rolled her eyes.

“You sure you don't have some kind of magical hold on him yourself, boss?” she asked Stark.

Stark cocked a smug grin. “Not telling if I did.”

Valkyrie roughly slapped Loki's back and rocked him forward a step. “Long as you keep him out of trouble, I'm happy.” She winked at Stark and stepped away. “Come on, arachnid boy. There's houses to build.”

“Spider-man,” Peter corrected but he followed after her anyway, Heimdall joining them.

Stark pulled out his phone. He called up a map and held it out to Loki. “You feeling up to teleporting somewhere? I can get the chopper if you're not.”

“What is there? It's not far.” Loki tilted his head at the map. It was further north but within Norway itself.

“It's a surprise.”

Loki raised an eyebrow. Stark merely smiled coyly in response.

“How romantic,” Korg gasped in a not too quiet tone to Miek.

Loki rolled his eyes at the pair and put a hand to Stark's arm. “We may need the aircraft to return but I can get us there.” Stark nodded. Loki pulled at the magic within himself and they blinked away in a green flash.

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

This is the last explicit chapter.

They appeared atop a hillside covered in alpine trees. Snow dusted the ground. The view beyond was nothing but evergreen and white to the horizon. Loki cast a long look around and found a cabin behind them. It was small and rustic but clearly recently built.

“You like it?”

Loki turned back to Stark. “This is for us?”

“A little getaway. For when we need some *alone* time,” Tony revealed. Loki hadn’t exactly answered his question so concern visibly clouded Stark’s features as he worried, “If it’s a stupid idea, I can sell it off or-”

Loki kissed him. The man doubted himself far too often. He poured into the kiss all his excitement for the place before letting the kiss end with a smack of their lips. He murmured, “It is wonderful. Thank you.”

“Yeah?” Stark still pushed for reassurance. “Wait until you see inside.”

“Yes indeed.” Loki smiled, then looked down. “I’m simply not used to surprises but I assure you I’ll enjoy them all.”

Stark’s features softened. “Then I better get to surprising you more often.” He took Loki’s hand in his own, squeezed, and led them up toward the cabin. Loki’s heart fluttered at the words and the move. He somehow doubted he’d ever get used to Stark’s surprises. Good surprises were a luxury he hoped to always cherish.

The cabin was made of real logs, a small porch facing the view, and the interior was just as rustic. It had tiny flares of Stark’s modern aesthetic. The sink and half-sized fridge were sleek but most everything else was wood and handmade. There were only two rooms. The main room with kitchen and sitting area, a fireplace and sofa. And the bedroom beyond with a four-poster bed covered in luxurious, warm blankets. A tiny bathroom connected to the bedroom. It was small, cozy, and simple. It was perfect.

“Darling...” Loki spun once in the living space, taking in every little detail. “You *built* this for me?”

“I’ll build you more if they all get this reaction.” Stark walked up and wrapped arms around him. “I’ll build you a whole damn skyscraper and plaster your name on it.”

Loki cupped Stark’s face even as he teased, “Isn’t that more your thing?”

“It can be yours too, my fucking gorgeous diva.”

“Diva? My dearest, look who’s talking.”

Loki kissed him, slow and adoring, lips parting to tease his tongue against Stark's. The other man hummed in a deep rumble that sent shivers through Loki. His hands slid down Stark's cheeks and neck to grip him by his suit's lapels. He walked backwards, pulling Stark with him into the bedroom. Stark's hands dropped to cup Loki's ass, picking him up, pressed against Stark's front, for the remaining few feet to the bed. The kiss only broke as he set him down on the edge of the bed.

Stark shrugged off his suit's jacket but Loki swept a hand between them, magicking both sets of clothing into folded piles on the corner chair, his cape draped over the back..

“Impatient sorcerers,” Stark harassed as he climbed onto the bed, stealing kisses. He pulled Loki down lengthwise with him.

“Practical,” Loki corrected. “Less wrinkles gathered on the floor.” Loki hooked a leg around Stark's hip as they lay facing one another on their sides.

“But I didn't get to unwrap *my* present...” Stark's hands slid down Loki's backside to cup his bare ass.

Loki nipped Stark's lower lip. “I could put it back on.”

“Hell no.” Stark kissed him soundly. Loki hummed happily into the kiss, nudging Stark onto his back, as he climbed atop him. He kept most of his weight on elbows to Stark's sides, their hips pressed together, firming cocks pinned between. His long dark hair fell forward over one shoulder and ghosted along skin. Stark's hands squeezed at his ass. Kisses deepened and hunger floated pleasantly between them. The air was silent but for hums and wet lips and skin against skin.

Loki rolled his hips and shifted them to rub his cock solidly against Stark's. He ended the kiss with a happy growl and kissed his way down over gray speckled beard to nip along delicate neck and throat. Stark's hands reluctantly slid up his back to twist in Loki's long hair. Loki kissed a scar on Stark's shoulder and made his way for another he knew well beside Stark's left nipple. He was not the only one with scars from the years past.

He shifted weight onto one elbow and slipped a hand between them, wrapping long fingers around both his cock and Stark's, stroking as he suckled at Stark's left nipple. The man beneath him moaned in the most delicious low rumble. Loki tugged with his teeth at the nipple, earning another moan, before making his way across firm chest to tease the other. He stroked slow, in no rush whatsoever.

He released their cocks moments later and continued his kisses down Stark's stomach, nuzzling at his navel, before following a gray speckled happy trail to Stark's cock. Loki went straight to the base, pressing wet, open-mouthed kisses to the velvet skin, and slowly made his way up the length pinned to Stark's stomach.

“Oh baby,” Stark groaned, twisting fingers in Loki's hair. He pulled the hair back and to one side, drinking in the sight of Loki's lips on him. Loki swirled a hot tongue over the head as he reached it and Stark gasped, “Fuck...”

Loki wrapped lips around the head and suckled, teasing around the cap, before leisurely sliding down. Stark's moans were heavenly. Deep and rumbling and adoring. Loki pressed a steady hand to Stark's hips to keep him still as he continued to swallow the man down. He hit the back of his throat and Loki shifted to take the rest. Stark was a gorgeous trembling mess. Loki paused with all he could manage, sucking firmly, then just as gradually released him, sliding from his lips with a pop.

“*Lokes*,” Stark gasped. He leaned up and pulled Loki by the hair for a wet, sloppy kiss.

Loki reached out with his mind and he wasn't surprised to find the tube of lubricant hidden in the nightstand. He suckled on Stark's lower lip as he magicked the bottle to his free hand. He broke the kiss and leaned upright, shifting to sit on Stark's lower chest, legs to his sides, and tossed his hair back once Stark released it. He uncapped the lubricant and slicked down fingers.

Stark took him in with the most stunning of amber eyes. Hands slid up Loki's thighs and then one hand teased over Loki's cock, gently stroking. Loki moaned lightly at the touch and bit down on his lower lip, reaching slicked fingers back behind himself.

Stark's mouth dropped open as he watched Loki slick himself, stretching and lubricating. “I get a show too? Fuck I'm definitely building you that skyscraper.”

Loki huffed a laugh and lifted himself up off Stark's chest, back arched and twisted to slide fingers into himself, his own cock standing at attention. Stark continued to stroke with one hand but cupped and lifted Loki's balls, tilting his own head to the side to take in Loki's working on himself.

“*Oh, shit babe...*”

Loki licked at his own lower lip, loving being such the center of Stark's attention, and dragged out the 'show' a bit with Stark enjoying it so much. Eventually, however, he slid fingers from himself and added more lubricant before reaching back to stroke Stark's cock and slick him down. Stark's moan was delicious. Loki shifted back and Stark released his cock. His hands went to Loki's thighs instead.

Loki grinned down at the man gaping up at him as he sunk down onto his cock. It was endlessly satisfying to please Stark. The man moaned, mouth hanging open, and trembled when Loki seated himself fully, ass against Stark's hips. Loki paused a moment to adjust to the thick heat buried inside of him before he rolled his hips, grinding Stark against his inner walls in the most delightful way.

“*Holy fuck*,” Stark growled, oh so slightly rocking his hips counter to Loki's grinding, thrusting firmly against his prostate.

“*Tony*,” Loki gasped. The man's hands went to Loki's hips and pinned him down tighter. Loki's thighs trembled as Stark easily helped him ride his cock, knowing just how to rut up against Loki's rolling hips. “*My darling!*” Loki raised a hand to brush into his own hair, pulling it back, as he gripped Stark's right forearm with the other hand.

“*Shit, oh shit, you look so fucking good baby*,” Stark gasped up at him, hands on his hips starting to guide Loki into a bounce. He dug heels into the bedding and whimpered, “*Ride that cock. Please baby.*”

Loki happily took the request. He moved both hands into his hair as he began to bounce, his own cock bobbing. He drank in the sight of Stark staring up at him, his whole body flushed pink with desire, and eyes looking so endlessly adoring. He never felt more gorgeous than when Stark looked at him. He bounced harder on Stark's cock, pulling up further with the next bounce, and earner a loud, uncontrolled moan from the man. Fingers gripped firmly at Loki's hips. The bed squeaked as Loki quickened the pace.

His own moans mingled with Stark's. His hands dropped to grip Stark's forearms to keep steady, then shifted to Stark's chest, leaning forward slightly as he bounced. His hair fell forward.

Stark growled up at him, “*Fuck yes!*” He bent his knees and twisted feet in the bedding to thrust up to meet Loki's bounces.

Loki's eyes rolled back as Stark hit his prostate in new and wondrous ways. He dug short nails into Stark's chest. They worked together to climb toward the edge. Loki's eyes closed, mouth hanging open. “*Tony, Tony please, yes yes yes, more!*”

Stark redoubled his efforts to drive up into him. Skin smacked against slick skin. The bed complained loudly. The both of them moaned on endlessly. Loki's cock ached, teetering on the edge for ages, before it finally washed over him. He came with a shudder, hips bucking, bouncing without rhythm against Stark's thrusts up, and made a mess of the man beneath him.

Stark's groan was glorious, urgent grunting with rough thrusts, before he drove in deep and came within Loki. The sensation left Loki trembling all over. His arms gave way. He collapsed down on top of Stark, cheek pressed to the other man's, own face buried in the pillow. They gasped for breath together.

Stark rolled his hips and Loki whimpered, everything overly sensitive to the touch. Stark did it again just to hear Loki whine once more before sliding his cock out of him. They both gasped at the move.

“*Oh baby,*” Stark sighed into Loki's hair, moving hands to wrap arms around Loki, pressing him tighter still to his chest. “*My Lokes.*”

Loki's heart skipped at being claimed as *his*. He sucked in a steady breath and then nuzzled his cheek against Stark's, whispering into his ear, “*Yours.*”

Stark's arms tightened around him in response, clinging to him firmly. He was quiet for a heartbeat, then his voice was laced with more, “*Mine.*” The one word rumbled through his chest, firm and determined, adoring and possessive. It meant more. It meant everything.

Loki lifted his head and met Stark's deep gaze. He hovered above the man. This mortal. This human. How did he slot so easily against him? Loki moved a not too steady hand to Stark's cheek and whispered breathlessly back, “*Mine.*” The word was laced with just as much meaning.

Emotions rolled through Stark's eyes, some easier to identify than others, but on top of it all was need. Need for him. Need for this. He leaned into Loki's touch and his voice was rough but honest. “*Yours.*”

Loki kissed him. Sweet and warm and reassuring. The other man poured his own reassurances into the kiss in return. It was everything. They kissed until lips went numb and only then did Stark allow him to roll off onto his side. Loki covered his mortal in blankets and kissed him again until the man slept.

He watched him. Lines smoothed by slumber. Worry washed aside for hopefully good dreams. For the first time in many, many years, Loki thought about a future beyond Thanos, and he made plans.

Chapter 20

Thoughts rolled around in Loki's head, coming together to certain conclusions, until Loki could no longer stay still. He gingerly slipped from Stark's hold. The man muttered in his sleep but released him. Loki kissed his forehead and Stark settled again.

Loki magicked on his emerald henley and black sweats as he padded to the main room. He found teabags and then heated water with a touch, adding sugar and milk, before carrying the mug out onto the front porch. It was late afternoon. The sky was warm and golden as an early autumn sunset approached. Loki sipped his drink and took in the view.

He felt whole for the first time in a long while, despite his magic still recovering to full strength. He felt a purpose and a drive. It was Stark's doing. Weeks ago, would he believe such an idea? Himself and a mortal?

Life was never predictable.

A voice sounded in front of him, dark and familiar, "You should not have regained your powers."

Loki looked down the hillside and froze a moment at the sight of Mordo. He was no more than two meters away. Menacing yet there was something different. Perhaps it was the open space. Perhaps it was knowing what the human sorcerer was capable of doing. Perhaps it was the knowledge that despite the man's best efforts, Loki had prevailed, in the end, thanks to his mother. She would not hand him back his powers only to have him lose them again. Loki would prove himself worthy of the gift.

He set his mug down onto the railing of the patio and said dryly, "You are such a coward, mortal." He reached out and magicked on his battle armor, helm flickering into place. He stepped down to face Mordo. "How long have you been waiting for me to leave New Asgard? Since my powers returned? Afraid to face more than me?"

Mordo squared his shoulders as Loki advanced. "I have no quarrel with those refugees."

"I may be the best but I am not the only sorcerer amongst them. Will you set about hunting each of them as well?" Loki flicked his wrists to his sides and daggers appeared in his hands.

Mordo reached behind himself and pulled out his half-staff, shifting into a more defensive stance as Loki continued his slow approach. "I will rid this planet of all the sorcerers who would twist this world to their petty whims."

Loki imbued his daggers with green energy as he growled, "That's what I thought, you self-loathing wretch." He left a clone behind and teleported behind Mordo, bringing glowing daggers down onto his back. He sliced into Mordo's hood but drew no blood as the mortal shifted the world, teleporting to the right a handful of meters.

The coward.

Loki stalked after him. "Did you expect me to cower? Did you expect me quake at the sight of a mere mortal with tricks?" He twirled one dagger in his hand and then threw it with force, aiming for his chest, but Mordo managed to block with both half-staff and glowing shield, though he was knocked back a step at the force. "You cannot control the battlefield here. You leaped at the chance to get to me again but you did not plan well enough."

“No?” Mordo raised his chin defiantly. “Do not discount my *tricks*.” He turned to walk toward the cabin. “I know that which will get you to behave.” The cabin’s logs rolled upward in on one another, magicked to reveal the interior. Mordo leaped up into the cabin’s bedroom.

“*Anthony!*” Loki shouted, moving to leap after, but the ground shifted beneath his feet, turning into snowy quicksand which held him fast.

Stark woke but Mordo had him by the hair in the same moment. Stark punched but Mordo merely dragged the shorter man from bed and back out of the cabin. He tossed a naked Stark onto the snow and placed a boot to the middle of the man’s chest. Mordo pointed his half-staff at Loki.

“You will submit, or I will kill him, and then you.”

Loki’s heart raced in a panic. This was not happening. *This was not happening*. He snarled and stabbed at the ground with his daggers, green energy bursting from them to solidify the ground beneath his feet.

Mordo raised his half-staff to strike at Stark but Stark was not idle. He tapped at his watch on his wrist and pulled down an armored glove from the device.

So bloody clever, his tinkerer.

Stark slammed his palm against Mordo’s thigh as the man swung down, Stark firing off a repulsor blast. Mordo went flying, slamming into the foundation for the cabin.

Loki leaped the distance, landing between Mordo and Stark.

“Friday,” Stark gasped, voice unsteady. “Call Strange!”

Mordo staggered to his feet but Loki reached out with his own magic, green energy twisting around Mordo’s feet, locking him into place. Loki stalked closer, anger welling up at the man’s mere insolence to threaten Stark. “I will *rend* you to pieces, you worthless filth.”

Stark shifted onto his bare feet. “Loki, don’t get close!”

Loki ignored Stark’s shout and flipped a dagger around in his hand, preparing to strike, when Mordo lunged forward, palm slamming into his gut once more.

Mordo’s face turned smug as he pulled out green energy, seemingly victorious in his goading, but Loki’s features did not waver. He remained as Asgardian as ever.

Loki cocked a grin. “You cannot trick a trickster,” he murmured, dark and vengeful, “Do you think my mother would not protect me from the likes of *you*?” The green in Mordo’s hand pulled back into Loki, his whole being guarded against such a repeated attack, and then golden energy was pulled from Mordo, dragged out of him and into Loki. “I hope you *rot*,” Loki snarled.

The cabin behind Mordo slammed back into place, the magic flickering to nothing, and Mordo himself collapsed in gasping shock to his knees, his own power gone.

Strange’s portal appeared. Loki ignored it to give Mordo a solid, magical punch to the head with the butt of his dagger, knocking out the dazed man.

Stark came up to Loki’s side. “Did you...?”

“He still lives but he will no longer be a threat to any sorcerer.”

“Seems more than fucking fair,” Stark muttered, glaring down at the unconscious man, then looking up at Loki, “You okay?”

Loki nodded as Strange arrived.

“I see I’m late.”

Loki turned to Strange, who was taking in the whole scene. Possessiveness washed over Loki as Strange cast a look at Stark’s naked form. Loki materialized a heavy cloth cloak in his hands and wrapped it around Stark.

“Yes, you fucking are, once again,” Stark snapped, gratefully taking the cloak.

“Please do not attempt to punch me again,” Strange muttered dryly, walking over to inspect Mordo. “It would be embarrassing for all involved.”

Stark growled at him.

Strange put a hand to Mordo’s forehead. He blinked and looked up at Loki. “You removed his power.”

Loki raised his chin in answer.

Strange took him in a moment, then looked back down to Mordo, before saying plainly, “Thank you, for not killing him.”

“If he attacks either of us again I will destroy him.”

“Noted.” Strange reached to heft the unconscious man up onto his shoulder. “I will take him to a monastery. He will not be allowed to leave.”

“He better fucking not,” Stark said, shivering underneath his cloak.

“I promise.” Strange nodded to them and then turned for the same portal he’d arrived through. Only to turn back to Loki. “You are free from my bargain. You may go wherever you wish.”

It was the least the imbecile sorcerer could do after all which had happened. Loki remained silent. Strange merely nodded and disappeared through his portal, it shutting behind him.

Stark slumped down onto his knees beside him. Loki reached for the man. “Tony, are you alright?”

“I just... need a second...”

Loki picked the man up, one arm behind his back and the other underneath his legs, and carried him into the cabin. “You must be freezing.”

Stark shook his head though he allowed himself to be carried inside like a bride, his cloak fluttering as Loki walked them into the cabin. “I thought he was gonna...”

“He is not even a sorcerer supreme much less a god.” Loki carried Stark straight back to the small bathroom and set him directly in the clawed tub. “He would not best me twice.” The cloak around Stark vanished as Loki turned on the warm water to fill the tub. “And I could not allow him to harm you.”

“I can hold my own.” Stark waved a still gloved hand at him.

“That you can.” Loki kissed him as he magically shrugged off his own clothing and helm, parting it to climb into the tub with him. “And it was much needed. I am sorry for drawing him here.”

“Like it was your fucking fault?” Stark huffed, wrapping arms around Loki as he shifted to rest his back against the far end of the tub. His trembling, both from shock and cold, was settling down as the tub filled. “I’m here for whatever life throws at you, baby. *All of it.*”

Loki moved to rest his back to Stark’s chest, sliding down to rest the back of his head to Stark’s right shoulder. Stark’s arms squeezed around his upper chest. Loki rested hands over Stark’s. “And I am here for whatever life throws at *you*, darling.”

Stark pressed a kiss to Loki’s hair. He was quiet a moment, the rumbling of the tub filling echoing in the space, before he wondered sweetly, “This isn’t too hot for my giant?”

Loki turned and pressed his face against Stark’s neck, murmuring, “Not with your arms around me.”

Chapter 21

The new city was looking magnificent. The tents were gone. The streets were bustling. Asgardians wore mostly traditional garb but some Midgardian clothing was mixed in here and there. Shops bustled. Craftsmen worked. With their unique abilities to shape and create, the workers already had no small amount of orders from around Earth. They would sustain the village easily.

Stark's drones and robots brought and took supplies in a steady stream. Thor had agreed to his continued help. The Avengers building was finished. Despite Thor's concerns, the exterior matched well with the Asgardian aesthetic, while still appearing unique and different from the rest, a large A attached to the top third laboratory floor.

Loki slipped through the crowd wearing Midgardian clothing, a fitted black sweater and dark slacks. He was partial to the clothes Stark bought him, and the man had noticed, so his closet was now overflowing with fine pieces. Stark was always looking for ways to pamper him and Loki luxuriated in it all.

He passed between two families and ducked into the main community hall. There was no palace. Thor had refused that one be built. The only thing closest to a throne room was the community hall and that was filled with supplies and other things waiting for proper storage. A large round table sat at the far end of the long room rather than a throne. It was to seat Thor, Loki, and their advisers if anything needed deciding. Thor was taking this whole 'not actually being king' thing to heart.

Honestly, Loki could not blame him. Being Odin had been boring. The novelty of it wore thin rather quickly.

Thor sat at the right side of the table, looking over paperwork, both hand written and using Stark's tablets. One large sheet held Stark's plan for a new bifrost to be constructed off the cliffs, working with experts both Asgardian and Human, now that shelter had been handled. Loki cleared his throat as he approached. Thor looked up and his features brightened. "Brother!" He tossed aside a tablet. "To what do I owe the honor?"

"Can I not merely drop by?" Loki casually walked up to Thor and pulled out a chair, seating himself.

Thor laughed. "I had to drag you away from Stark's arms to help rebuild every morning. I thought perhaps you'd never leave his side now that construction was complete."

"I am not so clingy."

"You most certainly are, Loki." Thor grinned at him. "It looks good on you. To find someone so entralling." Loki huffed. Thor leaned back in his chair and shifted to take him in. "Happiness looks good on you. I am sorry to have doubted your interest before..."

Loki shrugged. "It was not so.... unreasonable a concern, brother."

Thor grunted.

The pair went quiet. Loki looked at his hands. He had indeed come with questions but he did not know where to begin. Thor waited patiently. The silence dragged on until Loki couldn't stand it any longer and asked bluntly, "Why did you and Jane end?"

Thor stared a moment, clearly surprised at the topic, but then answered honestly, "She was... It's

rather hard to explain. Things were complicated. I don't know..." Thor trailed off and shifted in his seat, slumping some. "It was good in the beginning, when Father, or well when *you* released me to do as I wished and not take the throne. For months we hardly ever left her bed and the way she-"

"I don't need details," Loki grimaced.

"*Eventually*," Thor shifted tracks. "She had questions. She wanted to know how many other humans I'd pursued before her, how things ended with them, what I would do when she turned old and frail, if I would be the final love of her life but she would not be the final love of mine, if I would mourn her but move on through many more after her death."

"She's an intelligent woman."

"And I offered her answers. She was no mere conquest." Thor looked to him, anguish in his eyes. "I told her of the apples but she refused."

Loki stared. He couldn't recall Thor ever offering the gift of godhood to any other. "Refused?"

"She did not wish to give up her humanity. She couldn't bear to live as I did, seeing so many friends come and go, to see so many die while I lived. And she felt she would not fit in with either Asgard or Earth. She would be an outcast amongst both. She... did not have a fantastic time visiting Asgard, and if she lived on for centuries, she'd be the odd one here on Earth as well. So things ended rather abruptly there." Thor reached for a tablet to busy his hands. "I wish her luck in finding a Midgardian to grow old with."

Loki's heart hammered. Would Stark refuse? Would the question itself, the offer itself cause the collapse of everything? He could barely hope to imagine a life beyond Thanos, but if it was coming to pass, then he wished to spend it with Stark and only Stark. Yet would the mortal see it the same as Jane had? A loss of something? A fate to not belong truly with either race?

Thor looked up at the silence to take in Loki's lost features. Thor softened but his words were cautionary. "Do be careful how you ask him, Loki."

Loki looked down at his hands.

"He is not the same but mortals see time so much more differently. Be cautious with the subject." Thor set the tablet aside and reached to clasp his brother's shoulder. "But do know that I would go with you to fetch the apple when he says yes."

He raised his eyes to meet Thor's gaze. "Do you think he would say yes?"

Thor took him in a long moment before answering, "I think he would do anything to continue to be with you, and so through that, I do think he will say yes, brother."

Loki's shoulders relaxed ever so slightly but he still pushed, "And you would bless such an idea? I've never... There has never been anyone I've wished to... yet I feel so selfish to wish it."

"Stark is a brilliant craftsman and a brave protector. He is a mortal most worthy of such a gift, and for the most worthy of reasons. Asgard would be made better to have him amongst us." Thor squeezed his shoulder. "I see nothing whatsoever to question of such an idea."

Loki was thunderstruck a moment. Thor thought so well of Stark? He thought so well of Loki's intentions? He breathed, "Truly?"

"Truly." Thor pulled him for a hug, nearly dragging Loki out of his chair in the process, but Loki

leaned into the hug this time, gently returning it with arms around Thor. The man squeezed him tightly, holding on for a long minute, before releasing him. He caught Loki's gaze as he cautioned one more time, "But do be clear with your words when you ask him. Be honest in what it will mean."

Loki nodded and moved to stand. He said rather cryptically, "I have many things to be honest with him." Thor raised an eyebrow. Loki sighed, "There is something else I must tell him of as well." He moved to leave. "I will tell you, too, after I have told him."

"I thought you were done with secrets and tricks," Thor called after him.

"Never, dear brother."

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains *all the mush and fluff* in the world. You've been warned.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I know you need a desk job but this is seriously below your pay grade,” Stark said to the man behind the receptionist desk inside the Avengers building. “You'll be bored out of your mind in a week.”

“That long?”

Stark tapped the computer screen. “I put Tetris on this bad boy.”

“Wow, going all out, 64-bits of excitement.”

“I suppose it could also run the latest Call of Duty.”

“Now we're talkin'.”

The second man standing to Stark's side slid more paperwork in front of him along the raised counter. Stark groused as he signed, “Seriously Happy how much more is there? Norway was supposed to cut us some slack with customs.”

“This *is* cutting us some slack. Pepper was on the phone with them for four hours yesterday.”

“Send her some thank you flowers.”

“She'd rather I sent her back all these signed before she leaves the office today.”

“Yeah yeah.” Stark paused mid-signature as he spotted Loki walking up to them. “Lokes! Meet the gang, babe.” Stark haphazardly returned to signing papers while tossing out introductions. “You've heard Happy Hogan's voice, kid watcher extraordinaire.”

Hogan emptied his hands and offered a handshake.

Loki took it and shook firmly. “A pleasure.”

“Likewise. Thanks for uh-” Stark tossed Hogan a look and Hogan cleared his throat before turning back to Loki. “Thanks for keeping him busy.”

Stark snorted.

Loki merely cocked a half smile.

“And this is Rhodey.” Stark gestured with his pen at the man sitting in the receptionist's chair. “Later I'm sure he'll probably put you in a headlock and tell you not to hurt me.”

“Dude, spoilers. It's better when I surprise them.”

“There's no need for the headlock,” Loki said. “I have no intentions of hurting him.”

“See? All settled.” Stark finished a pile of paperwork with a flourish, then groaned as Hogan slid yet more papers in front of him.

“How do I know he's not lying?” Rhodes eyed Loki cautiously, a possessive and protective tilt to his shoulders.

“The headlock keeps me from lying?” Loki questioned.

“No, but if I get the feeling that you are, it makes it easier to snap your neck.”

Stark rolled his eyes as he worked. “Take it down a notch. We get it. Insert big brotherly talk here. I already got the same treatment from Thor.”

“Yeah, well, you've never tried to take over the world with an alien army.” Rhodes eyed Loki. “I think I'm entitled to being a little skeptical.”

“Done under duress and torture. Talk to Thor if you want corroboration. Next brotherly bullet point please.” Stark finished the pile of papers and capped the pen. “And who says I've never tried to be corporate overlord of Earth.”

“You whine about just signing papers. I don't think you're the corporate overlord of anything.”

Loki hid a chuckle at the pair. It was actually good to see Stark had friends. He'd been beginning to wonder if Banner was the only one, and he'd been gone two years. He didn't even begrudge Rhodes' protectiveness. Stark merited protecting.

Stark spotted Loki's quiet laughter. “See? He even giggles cutely.” He turned to Loki, pulling him down for a pecked kiss.

“It is good seeing you happy,” Rhodes admitted. He moved to stand, slightly unsteady a moment as he settled on his feet. “But he hurts you, I smash his face in.”

“I assure you,” Loki said, looking to Rhodes. “There is a line forming for the honor, should the unthinkable happen.”

“Glad to hear it.”

Loki's gaze returned to Stark. “Are you done, darling? I need a moment of your time.” He tossed a glance at the other two. “Alone.”

Mild concern washed over Stark's features at the request but he turned to Hogan. “You got everything you need for now?”

Hogan collected all the paperwork strewn along the counter. “For now. I'm sure she'll fax us over more.”

Rhodes glanced at his watch. “I told Bruce I'd meet him upstairs so I might as well go do that. Find me when you're done?”

“Sounds good.” Stark slid an arm around Loki to move them down the long hall to their room but Loki instead steered them back toward the main doors out. Stark was surprised at the direction but called back to Rhodes, “Peter's here somewhere, probably getting his ass beat by Valkyrie, if you get tired of Bruce's projects.”

Rhodes chuckled. "The poor kid. I think he's nursing a crush."

"He shall be disappointed, then," Loki said cryptically. He had his own guesses where Valkyrie's interests lied.

They stepped outside and Loki hooked an arm with Stark's, guiding them toward the cargo ship.

"Nothing's wrong, right?" Stark worried. "Did I forget your birthday? Have you *told* me your birthday?"

Loki squeezed at the man's hand. "You've done nothing wrong, darling. Calm yourself." Stark released a long breath. Loki soothed, "I have something to show you."

Loki's own heart beat faster but he focused on the task at hand. They walked up the gangway into the empty cargo ship. He guided them back through the dim ship into a side holding cell, then released Stark to kneel before a panel. He ran a hand over it and it magically disappeared. A metal box sat within a hidden stash.

Loki looked back at an attentive Stark. He drew a long breath, steadying himself. This had to be first. The man needed to know this first. He carefully removed the box from the stash and set it on the floor. The dim room slowly glowed blue as Loki removed the top. Stark's eyes grew wide.

"Thor does not yet know it is here but I..." Loki plucked the tesseract from the box and held it up. His features glowed in its light. He looked up at Stark's stunned face. "You deserve to know it is here, for Thanos will come looking for it."

"How... How do you have it?"

"I was sent into the vaults during our final fight against Hela. I saw it and I... I thought perhaps I could bargain it for my life, for all our lives even. Gift it to Thanos and be left alone. I did not yet know..." He swallowed and met Stark's large brown eyes. "I did not yet know that someone would instead give me a reason to fight Thanos."

Stark's face softened but he still looked as if he was staring at a ghost. "He'll want this back?"

"Desperately. He seeks the infinity stones and this is one. There are others near but he will come for this one as well." Loki slowly stood with the tesseract in hand. "We must hide it. We must protect it. We must never let him possess it."

"Why are you telling me now, Lokes?" Stark looked away from the glowing cube and met Loki's gaze. His eyes were full of surprise and something more. "Why not keep it hidden? It's your trump card."

"Because, as I said..." Loki looked down and his hair fell forward, half concealing him, though he still glowed in the dim room. "I have someone to fight for. I have someone to fight with. I no longer wish to merely bargain my way to safety. I wish to defeat him." Loki's voice dropped to a whisper as he continued, "I wish to vanquish him with you, my love, and then I wish to spend the rest of my days with you, in a universe without such a monster to loom over us. I wish it with everything in my heart."

The room was heavy with silence. Stark was quiet. Loki kept his gaze down, trembling delicately as he waited.

Stark stepped close and put fingers underneath Loki's chin, raising his gaze to meet the mortal's. So much floated through Stark's eyes. His voice was warm when he finally spoke, "I would give

anything to see that come true, baby." His hand shifted and moved to cup Loki's left cheek. "We're gonna make it happen. You hear me? We're going to defeat that son of a bitch and we're gonna get that happy ending."

Loki melted and leaned into the man's hand. "I believe *you* are the only one who could best him."

"*We* are the only ones that can best him," Stark corrected. "I can't do this without you. Not anymore. Not ever."

Loki nodded against his hand. "I would be nowhere but by your side."

"That's the only place I want you, Loki." He kissed him. It was sweet yet reaffirming, deepening a moment before breaking. He looked down at the tesseract. "We'll tell your brother and we'll build it a bunker. Thanos is not getting his fucking hands on it." Then he met Loki's eyes again. "Thank you for trusting me with it."

"I trust you in every way, and I wish no secrets between us, certainly nothing of this size."

"That means a lot, especially from the god of mischief." Stark smiled as he lightly teased, then kissed Loki's right cheek. "I trust you too. I trust in every word you've said."

Loki kissed his lips, lingering a moment, before he turned to set the tesseract back into its container. He righted himself and cupped Stark's face with now freed hands. "There is one more thing I must discuss, Anthony."

Stark raised an eyebrow at his full first name but waited.

Loki drew a deep breath before he said, "I would grow old with you. I would be with you for however many long years I am granted but to do so would be impossible as things are now. I would cherish every moment of having you, my darling, but I selfishly wish for more." Stark blinked at the topic but Loki pushed on. "There is a way to grant you a longer life, one more parallel to my own. You would live many hundreds more years. It would not be easy to accomplish, but for you, I would collect what was needed. You would live a lifetime many times over what a mortal should and I know such an offer is monumental to ask. You do not have to answer me now, but I would know eventually if you would join me in millennia together."

Stark gaped for a heartbeat, but then Loki was surprised at the immediate, firm reply which came an instant later.

"Yes."

It was Loki's turn to look dumbfounded. He had not expected an instant answer, much less a positive one.

Stark cupped his cheeks in return and said firmly, "Yes, baby, yes. I'll help. Whatever you need to get it done. I worried about it, but I didn't ask because I didn't think... Hell, if we all live past Thanos, and you still want me around in five years even, that'll be a fucking miracle."

Loki shook his head against his hold. "Ridiculous. I shall want you in five hundred years."

"You don't know-"

"No, I don't, but neither do you, darling. Whatever is to happen, the universe should be a better place to have many more years of your creations, but I don't offer this to change Midgard. I offer it to have you, to be with you. I..." His heart raced but the words spilled out all the same. "You are

my love and I would have you *always*, Anthony.”

“Baby...” Stark gasped, eyes wide and adoring, before he kissed him, multiple pecks piled on top of one another, until they lingered in a deep kiss. Loki's heart skipped. This man would be his. This man would always be his. Please. Stark pressed his forehead to Loki's as the kiss broke. He kept Loki's gaze as he spoke emphatically, “You're not allowed to gift me thousands of years and then walk away, Loki. This is it. You and me. This is it. You're mine. My heart. Mine.”

“Yours,” Loki soothed back to him. “I have never thought of giving such a gift to anyone, and I will never think to gift it to anyone else. Only you. You are mine. Mine, dearest.”

“Yours,” Stark repeated. He kissed him again and it dragged on and on, every swirling emotion poured into it, until they had to break for air. Stark's voice trembled as he whispered against Loki's lips. “I love you. I'm so lost in you. I need you. Please never go.”

“I love you,” Loki soothed. His hands moved down to wrap arms around Stark. “I need you just as desperately. I will go nowhere. I promise. So long as you'll have me.”

“I'll *always* have you.” Stark's hands slid back to twist into Loki's hair. “You're it. You're all I need. Oh baby...”

They kissed again. There was so much said, so much to digest, so much to accept. It was ages before they broke apart and still Stark stole pecked kisses from bruised lips. It was Loki who broke the quiet with a soft, “Thank you.”

Stark tilted his head. “For what?”

“For accepting... everything. The tesseract. The offer. My words.”

“Loki, *nothing* you *ever* tell me can make me run away. *Nothing*.”

Loki released a breath he did not realize he was holding. “Truly?”

“I swear. You're fucking stuck with me, hopefully for a long damn time, if this plan of yours works.”

“And if *your* plan against Thanos works.”

“Touché.” Stark pecked his lips. “I guess we should show your brother the big blue cube.” He made no move to untangle himself from Loki.

“I suppose.” Loki squeezed the man in his arms.

Stark smiled. “Does this whole thing mean I get to be the god of something?”

Loki chuckled. The man was always quick to tease but it was endlessly endearing.

“I'm serious!” Stark huffed.

“And what would you be the god of, my darling?”

“I don't know, the bedroom?” Stark winked.

Loki burst into true laughter.

“Don't fucking laugh so loud!” Stark shoved his shoulder and finally pulled away, reaching to

cover the box and pick up the container with the tesseract inside. “A man could get the impression he's not performing in the bedroom as well as he thought.”

Loki rolled his eyes. “Hardly, dearest. I can use the title in the privacy of our own bedroom, if you'd like.” He took Stark in a moment, then added, “How about the God of Creation?”

“Sounds like I made the universe. I'll take it.”

“I meant your tinkering but the God of Tinkering has less of a ring to it.”

“Creation it is.” Stark cocked a grin as they walked out of the cargo ship together. “Let's go tell Thor.”

“He shall be mightily pleased.”

“He better be. He's going to have the best damn brother-in-law *ever*.”

“Oh so now we are to be wed?” Loki harassed in return.

“In a few hundred years. You know, after we save the universe and settle down.”

Loki chuckled. “Sounds perfect.”

Stark pulled him down for another stolen kiss.

END

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to all the wonderful readers, commenters, and kudos. It's been a blast sharing this fic with you. I will tease that I plan on a sequel regarding golden apples but it may be a few months before it's finished and posted. If you want teasers on my progress, follow my [tumblr](#) or the tag 'my frostiron nonsense'. Thanks again!

Works inspired by this [pawed](#) by [TheRedDragon173](#)

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